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BEYOND
FANTASY FICTION

THE GOD BUSINESS
By Philip José Farmer

GONE WITCH *By Roy Hutchins*

MARCH
1954
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EDITED BY
H. L. GOLD

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by Arthur Godfrey

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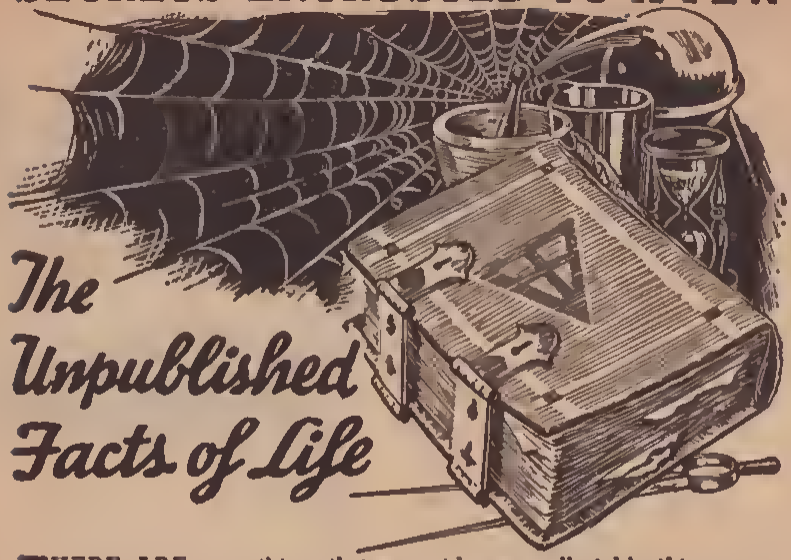

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Half-gads gone; lost lease. Oppartunities aggressive yaung deities. Executive ability, knawledge madern business methads. State qualificatians, pawers . . .

Illustrated by SIBLEY

IT was seven-thirty in the evening. I stood with Major Lewis, her father, the general, and other assorted high brass and V.I.P.s, on the rim of the Area. Though the moon was just coming up, its light, reflecting off the snow on the ground, was bright enough to read by. About ten yards ahead of us, the snow and the cold ended, and the lush tropical warmth of the Area began. Palm trees in Central Illinois—in January.

General Lewis said, "We'll allow you two days to contact Durham, Mr. Temper. Wednesday, at 1400, we begin our new assault. Marines equipped with bows and arrows and BB guns will be packed into gliders with pressurized cabins. These will be released from their tow planes at high altitudes. They

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will land on U.S. Route 24, just soutb of the city limits of Onaback. They will march up South Adams until they reach the business district. By then, I hope, you will have located and eliminated the source of this trouble."

For "eliminated," read "assassinated." By his expression, he thought I couldn't do it. General Lewis disliked me, not only because I was a civilian with authority, backed by the President himself, that not even a three-star general could top, but because the conditions of my assignment with his daughter were unorthodox to say the least. Alice Lewis was not only a major and a woman—sbe was a mightily attractive one and young for her rank.

She stood there, shivering, in her bra and panties, wbile I stripped down to my own sborts. Once we were safely in the woods, we would take off the rest of our clothes. When in Rome . . .

Marines with bows and arrows and BB guns—no wonder the military was miserable. But, once inside the Area controlled hy my former professor, Durham, and his magical Brew, firearms simply refused to work. And the Brew *did* work, making addicts of all who tasted it.

All but me.

I was the only one who had thought to have myself conditioned against it.

DR. Durf asked me a few questions wbile someone strapped a three-gallon tank of distilled water to my back. Tbe doctor was the Columbia psychiatrist who had conditioned me against the Brew.

Suddenly, in the midst of a casual remark, be grabbed the back of my bead. A glass seemed to appear from nowhere in his fist. He tried to force its contents past my lips. I took just one sniff and knocked the glass from his grip and struck him with the other fist.

He danced back, bolding the side of bis face. "How do you feel now?" be asked.

"I'm all right," I said, "but I thought for a moment I'd choke. I wanted to kill you for trying to do that to me."

"I bad to give you a final test. You passed it with a big A. You're thoroughly conditioned against the Brew."

The two Lewises said nothing. They were irked because I, a civilian, had thought of this method of combating the allure of the Brew. The thousand Marines, scheduled to follow me in two days, would bave to wear oxygen masks to save them from temptation. As for my companion, sbe had been hastily put under hypnosis by Durf, but be didn't know bow successfully. Fortunately, her mission would not take as long as mine. She was supposed to go to the source of the Brew and bring back

a sample. If, however, I needed help, I was to call on her. Also, though it was unstated, I was to keep her from succumbing to the Brew.

Shivering, we shook hands all around and we walked away. Warm air fell over us like a curtain. One moment, we were shivering; the next, sweating. That was bad. It meant we'd be drinking more water than we had provided ourselves with.

I looked around in the bright moonlight. Two years had changed the Illinois-scape. There were many more trees than there had been, trees of a type you didn't expect to see this far north. Whoever was responsible for the change had had many seeds and sprouts shipped in, in preparation for the warmer climate. I knew, for I had checked in Chicago on various shipments and had found that a man by the name of Smith—Smith!—had, two weeks after Durham's disappearance, begun ordering from tropical countries. The packages had gone to an Onaback house and had ended up in the soil hereabouts. Durham must have realized that this river-valley area could not support its customary 300,000 people, once the railroads and trucks quit shipping in cans of food and fresh milk and produce. The countryside would have been stripped by the hungry hordes.

BUT when you looked around at the crowded fruit trees, bananas, cherries, apples, pears, oranges, and others, most of them out of season and flourishing in soils thought unfavorable for their growth—when you noted the blackberry, blueberry, gooseberry, and raspberry bushes, the melons and potatoes and tomatoes on the ground—all large enough to have won county-fair first prizes in any pre-Brew age—then you realized there was no lack of food. All you had to do was pick it and eat.

"It looks to me," whispered Alice Lewis, "like the Garden of Eden."

"Stop talking treason, Alice!" I snapped at her.

She iced me with a look. "Don't be silly. And don't call me Alice. I'm a major in the Marines."

"Pardon," I said. "But we'd better drop the rank. The natives might wonder. What's more, we'd better shed these clothes before we run into somebody."

She wanted to object, but she had her orders. When in Rome . . . Even though we were to be together at least thirty-six hours, and would be mother-naked all that time, she insisted we go into the bushes to peel. I didn't argue.

I stepped behind a tree and took off my shorts. At the same time, I smelled cigar smoke—expensive cigar smoke. I slipped off the webbing holding the tank to my

back and walked out onto the narrow trail. I got a hell of a shock when I did.

A monster leaned against a tree, bis short legs crossed, a big Havana sticking from the side of his carnivorous mouth, his thumbs tucked in an imaginary vest.

I shouldn't have been frightened. I sbould have been amused. This creature had stepped right out of a very famous comic strip. He stood seven feet bigh, had a bright green hide and yellow-brown plates running down bis cbest and belly. His legs were very short, his trunk long. His face was half-man, half-alligator. He had the two enormous bumps on top of his head and the big disb-sized eyes. The same half-kindly, balf-stupid and arrogant look was upon bis face. He was complete, even to baving four fingers instead of five.

MY sbock came not only from the unexpectedness of his appearance, but from the fact that there is a big difference between something seen on paper and that seen in the flesb. This thing was cute and humorous and lovable in the strip. Transformed into color and substance, it was monstrous.

"Don't get scared," said the apparition. "I grow on you after a while."

"Who are you?" I asked.

At that moment, Alice stepped out from behind a tree. She gasped and grabbed my arm.

He waved his cigar. "I'm the Allegory on tbe Banks of the Illinois. Welcome, strangers, to the domain of the Great Mahrud."

I didn't know what he meant by those last few words. And it took a minute to figure out that his title was a pun derived from the aforesaid cartoonist and from Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop.

"Albert Allegory is the full name," he said. "Tbat is, in this metamorph. Other forms, otber names, you know. And you two, I suppose, are outsiders who wish to live along the Illinois, drink from tbe Brew and worship the Bull."

He held out bis hand with the two inside fingers clenched and the thumb and outside finger extended.

"This is the sign that every true believer makes when he meets another," he said. "Remember it and you'll be saved much trouble."

"How do you know I'm from outside?" I asked. I didn't try to lie. He didn't seem to be bent on burting us.

He laughed, and his vast moutb megapboned the sound. Alice, no longer the cocky WHAM officer, gripped my hand hard.

He said, "I'm sort of a demigod, you might say. When Mahrud, bull be his name, became a god, he wrote a letter to me—using the U.S. mails, of course—and invited

me to come here and demigod for him. I'd never cared too much for the world as it was, so I slipped in past the Army cordon and took over the duties that Mahrud, bull be his name, gave me."

I too bad received a letter from my former professor. It had arrived before the trouble developed and I had not understood his invitation to come live with him and be his demigod. I'd thought he'd slipped a gear or two.

For lack of anything pertinent to say, I asked, "What are your duties?"

He waved his cigar again. "My job, which is anything but onerous, is to meet outsiders and caution tbem to keep their eyes open. They are to remember that not everything is what it seems, and they are to look beyond the surface of the deed for the symbol."

He puffed on his cigar and then said, "I have a question for you. I don't want you to answer it now, but I want you to think about it and give me an answer later." He blew smoke again. "My question is this—where do you want to go now?"

He didn't offer to expand his question. He said, "So long," and strolled off down a side-path, his short legs seeming to move almost independently of his elongated saurian torso. I stared for a moment, still shaking from the encounter. Then I returned to the tree behind which I'd left my water-tank and strapped it back on.

We walked away fast. Alice was so subdued tbat sbe did not seem at all conscious of our nudity. After a wbile, she said, "Something like that frightens me, because I don't understand it. *How* could a man assume a form like that?"

"We'll find out," I said with more optimism than I felt. "I think we'd better be prepared for just about anything."

"Then perbaps the story Mrs. Durham told you back at Base was true."

I nodded. The Professor's wife had said that, shortly before tbe Area was sealed off, she bad gone to the bluffs across the river, where she knew ber husband was. Even though he bad by tben announced himself as a god, she was not afraid of him. A violent teetotaler, Mrs. Durbam attributed the entire course of her husband's recent behavior to alcobol.

CERTAINLY, the hitherto meek Professor had kicked over the traces with a vengeance, announcing his sudden and complete affection for Peggy Rourke, the comeliest co-ed in his class in Classical Litt. at Traybell University. When Miss Rourke's "steady" —a Little-All-American football star, Andrew Polivinosel—had ob-

jected, the spindly middle-aged Durham had thrown the young husky out of the room with one hand.

Thereafter, Professor Durham's downfall (or rise) had been rapid. He had announced to Miss Rourke, and she had reported to her roommate, that while he knew he was much too old and ugly for her, things were about to change. The night of the Sophomore Frolic, he bad reeled through the snow-covered streets of the town, dressed only in his pants, with a bottle protruding from a hip pocket, and squirted red paint from a flitgun at the policemen and others who sought to stop his progress toward Peggy Rourke's dormitory. Apparently be had met both Peggy and her football player on their way back from the Frolic, for all three appeared to have disappeared that night.

According to the now-defunct Onaback papers, Peggy Rourke bad last been seen, shortly afterward, riding naked across the Illinois River on tbe back of a large red bull, and waving a bottle entbusiastically until bull and rider had reached the far shore and plunged into the forest on the bluffs beyond.

It was this apparently insane rumor that bad sent Mrs. Durham after her missing mate. She had taken two lawyers along, just in case. She was bighly incoherent about what happened across the river, but some strange force, apparently operated by Dr. Durham, had turned her into a large tailless ape, causing her to flee. The two lawyers, metamorphosed into skunks, had also beaten a retreat.

Considering these strange events, Alice said, "What I can't understand is how Durbam could do these things. Where's his power? What sort of gadget does he have?"

Hot as it was, my skin developed gooseflesh. I could scarcely tell her that *I* was almost certainly responsible for this entire situation. I felt guilty enough without actually telling the truth. Moreover, if I *had* told her what I believed to be the truth, she'd have *known* I was crazy. Nevertheless, that was the way it was, and that was why I bad volunteered for this assignment. I'd started it; I bad to finisb it.

"I'm thirsty," she said. "What about a drink, Pops? We may not get a chance at another for a long time."

"Damn it," I said as I slipped off the tank, "don't call me Pops. My name is Daniel Temper and I'm not so old that I could be . . ."

I stopped. I *was* old enough to be her father. In the Kentucky mountains, at any rate.

Knowing what I was thinking, she smiled and beld out the little cup she had taken from the clip on the tank's side. I growled, "A

man's only old as he feels, and I don't feel over thirty."

At that moment I caught the flicker of moonlight on a form coming down the path. "Duck!" I said to Alice.

She just had time to dive into the grass. As for me, the tank got in my way, so I decided to stay there and brazen things out.

When I saw what was coming down the path, I wished I had taken off the tank. Weren't there *any* human beings in this Godforsaken land? First it was the Allegory. Now it was the Ass.

He said, "Hello, brother," and before I could think of a good comeback, he threw his strange head back and loosed tremendous laughter that was half *ha-ha*! and half *hee-haw!*

II

I DIDN'T think it was funny. I was far too tense to pretend amusement. Moreover, his breath stank of Brew. I was half-sick before I could back up to escape it. My conditioning was working perfectly.

He was tall and covered with short blond hair, unlike most asses, and he stood upon two manlike legs that ended in broad hoofs. He had two long hairy ears, but otherwise he was as human as anybody else you might meet in the woods—or on the street. And his name, as he wasn't backward in telling me, was Polivinosel.

He said, "Why are you carrying that tank?"

"I've been smuggling the Brew to the outside."

His grin revealed long yellow horselike teeth. "Bootlegging, eh? But what do they pay you with? Money's no good to a worshiper of the All-Bull."

He held up his right hand. The thumb and two middle fingers were bent. The index finger and little finger were held straight out. When I didn't respond immediately, he looked hard. I imitated his gesture and he relaxed a little.

"I'm bootlegging for the love of it," I said, "and also to spread the gospel."

Where that last phrase came from, I had no notion, perhaps the reference to "worshiper" and the vaguely religious-looking sign that Polivinosel had made.

He reached out a big hairy hand and turned the spigot on my tank. Before I could move, he had poured out enough to fill his cupped palm. He raised his hand to his lips and slurped loudly. He blew the liquid out so it sprayed all over me. "Whee-oo! That's *water!*"

"Of course," I said. "After I get rid of my load of Brew, I fill the tank with ordinary water. If I'm caught by the border patrol, I tell them I'm smuggling pure water into our area."

Polivinosel went *hoo-hah-hah* and slapped his thigh so hard, it sounded like an axe biting into a tree.

"That's not all," I said. "I even have an agreement with some of the higher officers. They allow me to slip through if I bring them back some Brew."

He winked and brayed and slapped his thigh again. "Corruption, eb, brother? Even brass will rust. I tell you, it won't be long until the Brew of the Bull spreads everywhere."

Again he made that sign, and I did so almost at the same time.

He said, "I'll walk with you a mile or so. My worshipers—the local Cult of the Ass—are holding a fertility ceremony down the path a way. Care to join us?"

I shuddered. "No, thank you," I said fervently.

I HAD witnessed one of those orgies through a pair of field-glasses one night. The huge bonfire had been about two hundred yards inside the forbidden boundary. Against its hellish flame, I could see the white and capering bodies of absolutely uninhibited men and women. When General Lewis asked for his glasses back, I gladly gave him them with the remark tbat be could keep on looking if be wanted to, but that I was through. He sniffed and put the instrument back in its case. It was a long time before I could get that scene out of my mind. I used to dream about it.

When I declined the invitation, Polivinosel brayed again and slapped me on the back, or where my back would have been if my tank hadn't been in the way. As it was, I fell on my bands and knees in a patch of tall grass. I was furious. I not only resented his too-bigh spirits, I was afraid be had bent the thin-walled tank and sprung a leak in its seams.

But tbat wasn't the main reason I didn't get up at once. I couldn't move because I was staring into Alice's big blue eyes.

Polivinosel gave a loud wboop and leaped through tbe air and landed beside me. He got down on his bands and knees and stuck his big ugly mule-eared face into Alice's and bellowed, "How now, white cow! How high browse thou!"

He grabbed Alice by the waist and lifted her up high, getting up himself at the same time. There he held her in the moonlight and turned her around and over and over, as if she were a strange-looking bug he had caught crawling in the weeds.

She squealed and gasped, "Damn you, you big jackass, take your filthy paws off me!"

"I'm Polivinosel, the local god of fertility!" he brayed. "It's my duty—and privilege—to inspect your

qualifications. Tell me, daughter, have you prayed recently for a son or daughter? Are your crops coming along? How are your cabbages growing? What about your onions and your parsnips? Are your hens laying enough eggs?"

Instead of being frightened, Alice got angry. "All right, Your Asininity, would you please let me down? And quit looking at me with those big lecherous eyes. If you want that, burry along to your own little orgy. Your worshipers are waiting for you."

HE opened his hands so she fell to the ground. Fortunately, she was quick and lithe and landed on her feet. She started to walk away, but be reached out and grabbed her by the wrist.

"You're going the wrong way, my pretty little daughter. The infidels are patrolling the border only a few bundred yards away. You wouldn't want to get caught. Then you'd not be able to drink tbe divine Brew any more. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"I'll take care of myself, thank you," she said huskily. "Just leave me alone. It's getting so a girl can't take a snooze by herself in the grass without some minor deity or other wanting to wrestle!"

Alice was picking up the local lingo fast.

"Well, now, daughter, you can't blame us godlings for that. Not when you're built like a goddess yourself."

He gave that titanic bray that should have knocked us down, then grabbed both of us by the wrists and dragged us along the path.

"Come along, little ones. I'll introduce you around. And we'll all have a ball at tbe Feast of the Ass." Again, the loud offensive bray. I could see why Durbam had metamorphosed this fellow into his present form.

That thought brought me up short. The question was: *how* had he done it? I didn't believe in supernatural powers, of course. If there were any, they weren't possessed by man. And anything that went on in this physical universe had to obey physical laws.

Take Polivinosel's ears and hoofs. I had a good chance to study them more closely as I walked with him. His ears may have been changed, like Bottom s, into a donkey's, but whoever had done it bad not had an accurate picture in his mind. They were essentially human ears, elongated and covered over with tiny hairs.

As for the legs, they were human, not equine. It was true he had no feet, but his pale, shiny hoofs, though cast into a good likeness of a horse s, were evidently made of the same stuff as toenails. And there was still the faintest outline and curve of five toes.

It was evident that some bio-

logical sculptor had had to rechisel and then regrow the basic human form.

I looked at Alice to see what she thought of him. She was magnificent in her anger. As Polivinosel had been uncouth enough to mention, she had a superb figure. She was the sort of girl who is always president of her college sorority, queen of the Senior Prom and engaged to a Senator's son.

The type I had never had a chance with when I was working my way through Traybell University.

POLIVINOSEL suddenly stopped and roared, "Look, you, what's your name?"

"Daniel Temper," I said.

"Daniel Temper? D.T.? Ah, *hah, hoo, hah, hah!* Listen, Old D.T., throw that tank away. It burdens you down and you look like an ass, a veritable beast of burden, with it on your back. And I won't have anybody going around imitating me, see? *Hoohahheehaw!* Get it?"

He punched me in the ribs with a big thumb as hard as horn. It was all I could do to keep from swinging at him. I never hated a man—or deity—so much. Durham had failed if he had thought to punish him. Polivinosel seemed to be proud of his transformation and had, if I understood him correctly, profited enough by his experience to start a cult. Of course, he wasn't the first to make a religion of his infirmity.

"How will I be able to bootleg the Brew out?" I asked.

"Who cares?" he said. "Your piddling little operations won't help the spread of the divine Drink much. Leave that up to the rivers of the world and to Mahrud, bull be his name."

He made that peculiar sign again.

I couldn't argue with him. He'd have torn the tank off my back. Slowly, I unstrapped it. He helped me by grabbing it and throwing it off into the darkness of the woods.

Immediately, I became so thirsty, I could hardly stand it.

"You don't want that filthy stuff!" Polivinosel brayed. "Come with me to the Place of the Ass! I have a nice little temple there—nothing fancy, understand, like the Flower Palace of Mahrud, may he be all bull—but it will do. And we do have a good time."

All this while, he was ogling Alice shamelessly. Like all the degenerates in this area, he had absolutely no inhibitions. If I had had a gun, I think I would have shot him then and there. That is, if the cartridges could have exploded, only they wouldn't have.

"Look here," I said, abandoning caution in my anger. "We're going where we damned well please." I grabbed the girl's wrist.

More wrist-grabbing going on lately. "Come on, Alice, let's leave this glorified donkey."

Polivinosel loomed in our way. The slightly Slavic tilt of his eyes made him look more Missourimulish than ever. Big and mean and powerful, with the accent on mean.

"Don't think for a minute," be bellowed, "that you're going to get me mad enough to harm you so you can go tell your prayerman to report me to Mahrud! You can't tempt me into wrath! That would be a *mortal* sin, mortals!"

Shouting about my not being able to disturb his Olympian aloofness, he put his arm around my neck and with the other band reached into my mouth and yanked out my upper plate.

"You and your mushmouthing annoy me!" be cried.

He released bis cboking grip around my neck and threw the plate into the shadows of the forest. I rusbed toward the busb where I thought I'd seen the white teeth land. I got down on my hands and knees and groped frantically around, but I couldn't find them.

ALICE'S scream brought me upright. Too fast, for I bumped my bead hard against a branch. Dcspite the pain, I turned back to see wbat was the trouble and charged through the brush. And I banged my sbins hard against some object and fell flat on my face, knocking my breath out.

When I rose, I saw I'd tripped over my own water-tank. I didn't stop to thank wbatever gods might be for my good fortune. Instead, I picked the tank up and, running up to them, brought it crashing down against the back of bis bead. Soundlessly, he crumpled. I tbrew the container to one side and went to Alice.

"You all right?" I asked.

"Yes-s," sbe said, sobbing, and put ber head on my shoulder.

I judged sbe was more frightened and mad than burt. I patted her shoulder—she had beautifully smooth skin—and stroked her long black hair. But she wouldn't quit weeping.

"That filthy creep! First he ruins my sister, and now be tries to do the same to me."

"Huh?"

She raised her head to look at me. Look down at me, rather—she was an incb or two taller.

"Peggy was my half-sister, daughter by my father's first marriage. Her mother married a Colonel Rourke. But we were always close."

I wanted to bear more, but the immediate situation demanded my attention.

I turned Polivinosel over. His heart was still beating. Blood flowed from the gash in the back of

his scalp, not the clear icbor you expect from a god's veins.

"Type O," said Alice. "Same as it was before. And don't worry about him. He deserves to die. He's a big stupid jerk of a Don Juan wbo got my sister in trouble and wouldn't . . ."

She stopped and gasped. I followed her stricken gaze and saw that the top of the tank had fallen off and that the water had spilled into the dirt. And again I felt that sudden wrench of thirst. It was purely mental, of course, but that knowledge didn't make me less dry.

Sbe put ber band to ber throat and croaked, "All of a sudden, I'm thirsty."

"There's nothing we can do about it unless we find a source of uncontaminated water," I said. "And the longer we stand around talking about it, the thirstier we'll get."

The tank was empty, but stooping to check this sad fact, I saw light flash on something beneath a bush and retrieved my upper plate. With my back toward Alice, I inserted the teeth and, feeling a little more assured, told ber we'd better start walking on.

We did, but she still had the water problem on her mind. "Surely there are wells and creeks that are not infected. Only the river is filled with the Brew, isn't it?"

"If I were sure of that I'd not have taken that water-tank," I was unkind enough to point out.

She opened her mouth to reply, but just then we heard voices down the path and saw the flare of approaching torches. Quickly, we stepped into the brush and hid.

III

THE newcomers were singing. Their song owed its music to *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, but the words were Latin. It was wretched Latin, for their accent paid allegiance to the beat of the original English meter. It didn't bother them at all. I doubt if many even knew what they were singing.

"Orientis partibus
Adventavit Asinus,
Pulcher et fortissimus,
Sarcinis aptissimus.
"Orientis partibus
Adventavit . . . Eeeek!"

They had rounded the trail's bend and discovered their god, bleeding and unconscious.

Alice whispered, "Let's get out of here. If that mob catches us, they'll tear us apart."

I wanted to watch, to learn from their behavior how we should act when among the natives. I told her so and she nodded. Despite our antagonism, I had to admit that she was intelligent and brave. If she was a little nervous, she had good reason to be.

These people didn't act at all as I'd thought they would. Instead of wailing and weeping, they stood away from him, huddled together, not quite sure what to do. I didn't see at first what caused their attitude. Then I realized from their expressions and whispers that they were afraid to interfere in the affairs of a demigod—even one as demi as Polivinosel.

The thing that italicized their indecision was their youthfulness. There wasn't a man or woman in the group who looked over twenty-five, and all were of superb physique.

Something made a loud cracking noise down the path behind us. Alice and I jumped, as did the whole group. They took off like a bunch of scared rabbits. I felt like joining them, but I stayed. I did, however, pray that this wouldn't be another nerve-rocking monster.

It was merely a naked native, a tall lean one with a long thin nose, who looked as if he ought to be teaching in some college. The effect was intensified by the fact that he had his nose in a book. As I've said, the moonlight was strong enough for reading, but I hadn't really expected anyone to take advantage of it.

HIS scholarly appearance was somewhat marred by the dead squirrel, large as a collie, which hung from his back. He had been hunting, I suppose, though I'd never heard of hunting squirrels in the dark. Moreover, he carried no weapons.

All of this, except for the squirrel's size, was surprising. I'd seen

camera shots of the great beasts taken along the Area's edge, and I knew that the height of the men who had volunteered to drink the diluted river water had increased as much as two inches.

I watched him closely to see what he'd do when he saw Polivinosel. He disappointed me. When he came to the prostrate form, he did not hesitate or give any sign that he had seen the god except to lift his feet over the outstretched legs. His nose remained dipped in the book.

I took Alice's hand. "Come on. We're following him."

We walked behind the reader for perhaps a half-mile. When I thought it was safe to stop him, I called out to him. He halted and put his squirrel on the ground and waited for me.

I asked him if he had noticed Polivinosel lying on the path.

Puzzled, he shook his head.

"I saw you step over him." I said.

"I stepped over nothing," he insisted. "The path was perfectly clear." He peered closely at me. "I can see you're a newcomer. Perhaps you've had your first taste of the Brew. Sometimes, at first, it gives strange sensations and visions. Takes a little time to get adjusted to it, you know."

I said nothing about that, but I did argue with him about Polivinosel. Not until I mentioned the name, however, did he look enlightened. He smiled in a superior manner and looked down his long nose.

"Ah, my good man, you mustn't believe everything you hear, you know. Just because the majority, who have always been ignorami and simpletons, choose to explain the new phenomena in terms of ancient superstition is no reason for an intelligent man such as yourself to put any credence in them. I suggest you discard anything you hear—with the exception of what I tell you, of course—and use the rational powers that you were lucky enough to be born with and to develop in some university, providing, that is, you didn't go to some institution which is merely a training ground for members of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Odd Fellows, Knights of Columbus, Shriners, or the Lions, Moose and Elk. I scarcely—"

"But I *saw* Polivinosel!" I said, exasperated. "And if you hadn't lifted your feet, you'd have fallen over him!"

AGAIN, he gave a superior smile. "Tut, tut! Self-hypnotism, mass delusion, something of that sort. Perhaps you are a victim of suggestion. Believe me, there are many unsettling things in this valley. You mustn't allow yourself to be bamboozled by the

first charlatan who comes along and has an easy—if fantastic—explanation for all this."

"What's yours?" I challenged.

"Dr. Durham invented some sort of machine that generates the unknown chemical with which he is now infecting the Illinois River and eventually, we hope, the waters of the world. One of its properties is a destruction of many of the sociologically and psychologically conditioned reflexes which some term inhibitions, mores or neuroses. And a very good thing, too. It also happens to be a universal antibiotic and tonic—such a combination!—besides a number of other things, not all of which I approve.

"However, he has, I must admit, done away with such societal and politico-economic structurologies and agents as factories, shops, doctors, hospitals, schools—which have hitherto devoted most of their time and energy to turning out half-educated morons—bureaucracies, automobiles, churches, movies, advertising, distilleries, soap operas, armies, prostitutes and innumerable other institutions, until recently considered indispensable.

"Unfortunately, the rationalizing instinct in man is very hard to down, as is the power-drive. So you have charlatans posing as prophets and setting up all sorts of new churches and attracting the multitudes in all their moronic simplicity and pathetic eagerness to grasp at some explanation for the unknown."

I wanted to believe him, but I knew that the Professor had neither ability nor money enough to build such a machine.

"What is the peasant's explanation for the Brew?" I asked.

"They have none except that it comes from the Bottle," said the Rational Man. "They swear that Durham derives his powers from this Bottle, which, by description, is nothing more than a common everyday beer bottle. Some declare, however, that it bears, in *stiacciato,* the image of a bull."

GUILT brought sweat out on my forehead. So it *had* been my gift! And I'd thought I was playing a harmless little hoax on my likable but daffy old Classical-Litt prof!

"That story is probably derived from his name," I said hastily. "After all, his students used to call him 'Bull.' It wasn't only the fact that his name was Durham. His wife led him around with a ring in his nose and—"

"In which case, he fooled his students," said the Rational Man. "For he was, beneath that mild and meek exterior, a suppressed prize bull, a veritable stallion, a lusty old goat. As you may or may not know, he has any number of nymphs stabled in his so-called

Flower Palace, not to mention beautiful Peggy Rourke, now known as the—"

Alice gasped. "Then she *is* living! And with Durham!"

He raised his eyebrows. "Well, that depends upon whether or not you listen to these charlatans. Some of them would have it that she has become transfigured in some mystical-muddled manner—*multiplied,* they call it—and is each and every one of those many nymphs in Mahrud's seraglio, yet is in some way none of them and exists in essence only."

He shook his head and said, "Oh, the rationalizing species who must invent gods and dogmas!"

"Who's Mahrud?" I asked.

"Why, Durham spelled backward, of course. Don't you know that there is a tendency in every religion to avoid pronouncing the True Name? However, I believe that those fakers, the Scrambled Men, invented the name, mainly because they couldn't say it right. They insisted the pre-deity name be distinguished from the Real One. It caught on fast, probably because it sounded so Oriental and, therefore, in the minds of these peons, mystical."

I was getting so much data all at once that I was more mixed up than ever.

"Haven't you ever seen Mahrud?" I asked.

"No, and I never shall. Those so-called gods just don't exist, any more than the Allegory or the Ass. Nobody with a rational mind could believe in them. Unfortunately, the Brew, despite its many admirable qualities, does have a strong tendency to make one illogical, irrational and susceptible to suggestion."

He tapped his high forehead and said, "But I accept all the good things and reject the others. I'm quite happy."

SHORTLY after this, we came out on a country road I recognized.

The Rational Man said, "We'll be coming soon to my house. Would you two care to stop? We'll have this squirrel to eat and lots of Brew from the well in the backyard. Some of my friends will be there and we'll have a nice intellectual talk before the orgy starts. You'll find them congenial—they're all atheists or agnostics."

I shuddered at the idea of being asked to drink the bated Liquor. "Sorry," I said. "We must be going. But tell me, as a matter of curiosity, how you caught that squirrel. You're not carrying any weapon."

He waved his book. "Can't," he replied laconically.

"Can't? Why not?"

"No, not can't. K-a-n-t. Kant. You see, the Brew has had this extraordinary effect of stimulating

certain animals' growth. More than that, it has, I'm sure, affected their cerebral systems. They seem much more intelligent than before. A combination of increase in size of brain and change in organization of neurons, probably. Whatever the effect, the change has been most remarkable in rodents. A good thing, too. Wonderful source of food supply, you know.

"Anyway," he continued, as he saw my increasing impatience, "I've found that one doesn't need a gun, which no longer explodes in this area, anyway, nor a bow and arrow. All one has to do is locate an area abundant in squirrels and sit down and read aloud. While one is both enjoying and educating oneself, the squirrel, attracted by one's monotonous voice, descends slowly from his tree and draws nearer.

"One pays no attention to him—one reads on. The beast sits close to one, slowly waving its bushy tail, its big black eyes fixed on one. After a while, one rises, closes the book and picks up the squirrel, which is by now completely stupefied and never comes out of its state, not even when one takes it home and cuts its throat.

"I've found by experiment that one gets the best results by reading *The Critique of Pure Reason.* Absolutely stuns them. However, rabbits, for some reason, are more easily seduced by reading Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn.* In the French translation, of course. Friend of mine says that the best book for the birds is Hubbard's *Dianetics,* but one ought to take pride in one's tools, you know. I've always caught my pheasants and geese with *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex.*"

WE came to his estate and said good-by to him. Stepping up our pace, we walked for several miles past the many farmhouses along the gravel road. Some of these had burned down, but their occupants had simply moved into tbe barn or, if that had gone up in flames, too, had erected a lean-to.

"Photographs from Army balloons have shown that a good many houses in the city have burned down," I said. "Not only that, the grass is literally growing in the streets again. I've been wondering where the burned-out people were living, but this shows how they manage. They live like savages."

"Well, why not?" asked Alice. "They don't seem to have to work very hard to live in abundance. I've noticed we haven't been bitten by mosquitoes, so insects must have been exterminated. Sanitation shouldn't bother them—the Brew kills all diseases, if we're to believe that squirrel-reader. They don't have much refuse in the way

of tin cans, paper and so on to get rid of. They all seem very happy and hospitable. We've had to turn down constant invitations to stop and eat and drink some Brew. And even," she added with a malicious smile, "to participate in orgies afterward. That seems to be quite a respectable word now. I noticed that beautiful blonde back at the last farm tried to drag you off the road. You'll have to admit that that couldn't have happened Outside."

"Maybe I *am* bald," I snarled, "but I'm not so damned repulsive that no good-looking girl could fall in love with me. I wish I had a photo of Bernadette to sbow you. Bernadette and I were just on the verge of getting engaged. She's only thirty and—"

"Has she got all her teeth?"

"Yes, she has," I retorted. "She wasn't in the Iranian campaign to get hit in the moutb by a mortar fragment and then lose the rest of her upper teeth and hair through an infection with no antibiotics available because enemy fire kept her in a foxhole for five days."

I was so mad, I was shaking.

Alice answered softly, "Dan, I'm sorry I said that. I didn't know "

"Not only that," I plunged on, ignoring ber apology. "What have you got against me besides my teeth and hair and the fact that I thought of this conditioning idea and my superiors—including the Presidcnt—thought enough of my abilities to send me into this area without ten thousand Marines paving the way for me? As far as that goes, why were you sent with me? Was it because your father happens to be a general and wanted to grab some glory for you and him by association with me? If that isn't militaristic parasitism, what is? And furthermore . . ."

I raved on, and every time she opened her mouth, I roared her down. I didn't realize how loud I was until I saw a man and a woman standing in the road ahead of us, watching intently. I shut up at once, but the damage was done.

As soon as we were opposite them, the man said, "Newcomer, you're awfully grumpy." He held out a bottle to me. "Here, drink. It's good for what ails you. We don't have any harsh words in Mahrudland."

I said, "No, thanks," and tried to go around them, but the woman, a brunette who resembled a cross between the two Russells, Jane and Lillian, grabbed around my neck and said, "Aw, come on, skinhead, I think you're cute. Have a drink and come along with us. We're going to a fertility ceremony at Jonesy's farm. Polivinosel himself'll be there. He's deigning to mix with us mortals for tonight. And you can make

love with me and ensure a good crop. I'm one of Poli's nymphs, you know."

"Sorry," I said. "I've got to go."

I felt something wet and warm flooding over my scalp. For a second I couldn't guess what it was, but when I smelled the hop-like Brew, I knew! And I reacted with all the violence and horror the stuff inspired in me. Before the man could continue pouring the liquid over my head, I tore her grip loose and threw her straight into the face of her companion. Both went down.

Before they could rise, I grabbed Alice's hand and fled with her down the road.

IV

AFTER we had run about a quarter of a mile, I had to slow to a walk. My heart was trying to beat its way out and my head was expanding to fill the dome of the sky. Even my setting-up exercises badn't fitted me for this.

However, I didn't feel so bad when I saw tbat Alice, young and fit as she was, was panting just as hard.

"They're not chasing us," I said. "Do you know, we've penetrated into this area so easily, I wonder how far a column of Marines could have gone if they'd come in tonight. Maybe it would have been better to try an attack this way."

"We've tried four already," said Alice. "Two by day, two by night. The first three marched in and never came back, and you saw the camera shots of what bappened to the last."

We walked along in silence for a while. Then I said, "Look, Alice, I blew my top a while ago, and we almost got into trouble. So why don't we agree to let bygones be bygones and start out on a nice fresh foot?"

"Nothing doing! I will refrain from quarreling, but there'll be none of this buddy-buddy stuff. Maybe, if we drank this Brew, I might get to liking you. But I doubt if even that could do it."

I said nothing, determined to keep my mouth sbut if it killed me.

Encouraged by my silence—or enraged—she said, "Perhaps we might end up by drinking the Brew. Our water is gone, and if you're as thirsty as I am, you're on fire. We'll be at least fourteen bours without water, maybe twenty. And we'll be walking all the time. What happens when we just *have* to have water and there's nothing but the river to drink from? It won't be as if the stuff was poison.

"As a matter of fact, we know we'll probably be very happy. And that's the worst of it. That X substance, or Brew, or whatever you

want to call it, is the most insidious drug ever invented. Its addicts not only seem to be permanently happy, they benefit in so many other ways from it."

I couldn't keep silent any longer. "That's dangerous talk!"

"Not at all, *Mister* Temper. Merely the facts."

"I don't like it!"

"What are *you* so vehement about?"

"Why?" I asked, my voice a little harder. "There's no reason why I should be ashamed. My parents were hopheads. My father died in the state hospital. My mother was cured, but she burned to death when the restaurant she was cooking in caught fire. Both are buried in the old Meltonville cemetery just outside Onaback. When I was younger, I used to visit their graves at night and howl at the skies because an unjust god had allowed them to die in such a vile and beastly fashion. I . . ."

Her voice was small, but firm and cool. "I'm sorry, *Dan,* that that happened to you. But you're getting a little melodramatic, aren't you?"

I subsided at once. "You're right. It's just that you seem to needle me so I want to—"

"Bare your naked soul? No, thanks, Dan. It's bad enough to have to bare our bodies. I don't want to make you sore, but there's not much comparison between the old narcotics and this Brew."

"There's no degeneration of the body of the Brew-drinker? How do you *know* there isn't? Has this been going on long enough to tell? And if everybody's so healthy and harmless and happy, why did Polivinosel try to rape you?"

"I'm certainly not trying to defend that Jackass," she said. "But, Dan, can't you catch the difference in the psychic atmosphere around here? There seem to be no barriers between men and women doing what they want with each other. Nor are they jealous of each other. Didn't you deduce, from what that Russell-type woman said, that Polivinosel had his choice of women and nobody objected? He probably took it for granted that I'd want to roll in the grass with him."

"All right, all right," I said. "But it's disgusting, and I can't understand why Durham made him a god of fertility when he seems to have hated him so."

"What do you know about Durham?" she countered.

I TOLD her Durham had been a short, bald and paunchy little man with a face like an Irish leprechaun, with a wife who henpecked him till the holes showed, a soul like a poet's, with a penchant for quoting Greek and Latin classics, with a delight in making puns and with an unsuppressed

desire to get his book of essays, *The Golden Age,* published.

"Would you say he had a vindictive mind?" she asked.

"No, he was very meek and forbearing. Why?"

"Well, my half-sister Peggy wrote that her steady, Polivinosel, hated Durham because he had to take his course to get a credit in the Humanities. Not only that, it was evident that Durham was sweet on Peggy. So Polivinosel upset the doctor every time he got a chance. In fact, she mentioned that in her last letter to me just before she disappeared. And when I read in the papers that Durham was suspected of having murdered them, I wondered if he hadn't been harboring his hate for a long time."

"Not the doc," I protested. "He might get mad, but not for long."

"There you are," she said triumphantly. "He changed Polivinosel into a jackass, and then he got soft-hearted and forgave him. Why not? He had Peggy."

"But why wasn't Polivinosel changed back to a man then?"

"All I know is that he was majoring in Agriculture, and, if I'm to believe Peggy's letters, he was a Casanova."

"No wonder you were a little sarcastic when I gave my lecture," I said. "You knew more about those two than I did. But that doesn't excuse your reference to my baldness and false teeth."

She turned away. "I don't know why I said that. All I do know is that I hated you because you were a civilian and were being given such authority and entrusted with such an important mission."

I wanted to ask her if she'd changed her mind. Also, I was sure that wasn't all there was to it, but I didn't press the point. I went on to tell her all I knew about Durham. The only thing I kept back was the most important. I had to sound her out before I mentioned that.

"Then the way you see it," she said, "is that everything that's been happening here fits this Doctor Boswell Durham's description of the hypothetical Golden Age?"

"YES," I said. "He often used to lecture to us on what au opportunity the ancient gods lost. He said that if they'd taken the trouble to look at their mortal subjects, they'd have seen how to do away with disease, poverty, unhappiness and war. But he maintained the ancient gods were really men who had somehow or other gotten superhuman powers and didn't know how to use them because they weren't versed in philosophy, ethics or science.

"He used to say he could do better, and he would then proceed to give us his lecture entitled *How to Be a God and Like It.* It used

to make us laugh, because you couldn't imagine anyone less divine than Durham."

"I know that," she said. "Peggy wrote me about it. She said that was what irked Polivinosel so. He didn't understand that the doctor was just projecting bis dream-world into classroom terms. Probably he dreamed of such a place so he could escape from his wife's nagging. Poor little fellow."

"Poor little fellow, my foot!" I snorted. "He's done just what he said he wanted to do, hasn't he? How many others can say the same, especially on such a scale?"

"No one," she admitted. "But tell me, what was Durham's main thesis in *The Golden Age?*"

"He maintained that history showed the so-called common man, Mr. Everyman, was a guy who wanted to be left alone and was quite pleased if only his mundane life ran fairly smoothly. His ideal was an existence with no diseases, plenty of food and amusement and sex and affection, no worry about paying bills, just enough work to keep him from getting bored with all play and someone to do his thinking for him. Most adults wanted a god of some sort to run things for tbem while they did just what they pleased."

"Why," exclaimed Alice, "he wasn't any better than Hitler or Stalin!"

"Not at all," I said. "He *could* bring about Eden as we can see by looking around us. And he didn't believe in any particular ideology or in using force. He . . ."

I STOPPED, mouth open. I'd been defending the Professor!

Alice giggled. "Did you change your mind?"

"No," I said. "Not at all. Because the Professor, like any dictator, must have changed *his* mind. He *is* using force. Look at Polivinosel."

"He's no example. He always was an ass, and he still is. And how do we know he doesn't *like* being one?"

I had no chance to reply. The eastern horizon was lit up by a great flash of fire. A second or two later, the sound of the explosion reached us.

We were both shocked. We had come to accept the idea that such chemical reactions just didn't take place in this valley.

Alice clutched my hand and said sharply, "Do you think the attack has started ahead of schedule? Or is that one we weren't told about?"

"I don't think so. Why would an attack be launched around here? Let's go and see what's up."

"You know, I'd have thought that was lightning, except that—well, it was just the opposite of lightning."

"The negative, you mean?" I asked her.

She nodded. "The streak was—black."

"I've seen lightning streaks that branched out like trees," I said. "But this is the first tree that I ever . . ." I stopped and murmured, "No, that's crazy. I'll wait until I get there before I make any more comments."

We left the gravel road and turned right onto a paved highway. I recognized it as the state route that ran past the airfield and into Meltonville, about a mile and a half away. Another explosion lit up the eastern sky, but this time we saw it was much closer than we had first thought.

We hurried forward, tense, ready to take to the woods if danger threatened. We had traveled about half a mile when I stopped so suddenly that Alice bumped into me. She whispered, "What is it?"

"I don't remember that creekbed ever being there," I replied slowly. "In fact, I *know* it wasn't there. I took a lot of hikes along here when I was a Boy Scout."

BUT there it was. It came up from the east, from Onaback's general direction, and cut southwest, away from the river. It slashed through the state highway, leaving a thirty-foot gap in the road. Somebody had dragged two long tree trunks across the cut and laid planks between them to form a rough bridge.

We crossed it and walked on down the highway, but another explosion to our left told us we were off the trail. This one, very close, came from the edge of a large meadow that I remembered had once been a parking lot for a trucking company.

Alice sniffed and said, "Smell that burning vegetation?"

"Yes." I pointed to the far side of the creek where the moon shone on the bank. "Look at those."

They were the partly burned and shattered stalks and branches of plants about the size of pine trees. They were scattered about forty feet apart. Some lay against the bank; some were stretched along the bottom of the creekbed.

What did it mean? The only one way to find out was to investigate. So, as we came abruptly to the creek's end, which was surrounded by a ring of about a hundred people, we tried to elbow through to see what was so interesting.

We never made it, for at that moment a woman screamed, "He put in too much Brew!"

A man bellowed, "Run for your lives!"

The night around us was suddenly gleaming with bodies and clamorous with cries. Everybody was running and pushing everybody else to make room. Neverthe-

less, in spite of their reckless haste, they were laughing as if it was all a big joke. It was a strange mixture of panic and disdain for the panic.

I grabbed Alice's hand and started running with them. A man came abreast of us and I shouted, "What's the danger?"

He was a fantastic figure, the first person I had seen with any clothing on since I'd shed my own. He wore a red fez with a tassel and a wide green sash wound around his waist. A scimitar was stuck through it at such an angle it looked like a ducktail-shaped rudder. The illusion was furthered by the speed at which he was traveling.

V

WHEN he heard my shout, he gave me a wild look that contributed to the weirdness of his garb and shouted something.

"Huh?"

Again he yelled at me and sped on.

"What'd he say?" I panted to Alice. "I'll swear he said 'Horatio Hornblower.' "

"Sounded more like *'Yorasiffencornblows,'* " she replied.

That was when we found out why the crowd was running like mad. A lion the size of a mountain roared behind us—a blast knocked us flat on our faces—a wave of hot air succeeded the shock—a hail of rocks and clods of dirt pelted us. I yelped as I was hit in the back of one leg and, for a moment, I could have sworn my leg was broken.

Alice screamed and grabbed me around the neck. "Save me!"

I'd have liked to, but who was going to save *me*?

Abruptly, the rocks quit falling and the yells stopped. Silence, except for the drawing of thankful breaths. Then giggles and yelps of pure delight and calls back and forth and white bodies were shining in the moonlight as they rose like ghosts from the grass. Fear among these uninhibited people could not last long. They were already joshing each other about the way they'd run and then were walking back to the cause of their flight.

I stopped a woman, a beautiful buxom wench of twenty-five—all the adult female Brew addicts, I later found, were pretty and well-shaped and looked youthful—and I said, "What happened?"

"Ah, the fool Scrambler put too much Brew in the hole," she replied, smiling. "Anybody could see what'd happen. But he wouldn't listen to us, and his own buddies are as scrambled as he is, thanks to Mahrud."

When she uttered *that* name, she made *that* sign. These people, no matter how lightly and irreverently

they behaved in other matters, were always most respectful toward their god and observant of the few signs and symbols of godhead that they did have.

I was confused. "He? Who?" I said, inelegantly.

"He *haw*!" she brayed and my body turned cold as I thought she was referring to Polivinosel. But she was merely mocking the form of my question. "The Scrambled Men, of course, Baldy." Looking keenly at me in a single sweep that began at my feet and ended at the top of my head, she added, "If it weren't for that, I'd think you hadn't tasted the Brew yet."

I didn't know what she meant by *that*. I looked upward, because she had pointed in that direction, but I couldn't see anything except the clear sky and the huge distorted moon.

I DIDN'T want to continue my questioning and expose myself as such a newcomer, so I left the woman and, with Alice, followed the crowd back. Their destination was the end of the creek, a newly blasted hole which showed me in a glance how the dry bed had so suddenly come into existence. Somebody had carved it out with a series of the tremendous blasts we'd heard.

A man brushed by me. His legs pumped energetically, his body was bent forward, and one arm was crooked behind his back. His right hand clutched the matted hairs on his chest. Jammed sideways on his head was one of those plumed cocked hats you see the big brass of men's lodges wear during parades. A belt around his otherwise naked waist supported a sheathed sword. High-heeled cowboy boots completed his garb. He frowned deeply and carried, in the hand behind his back, a large map.

"Uh—Admiral," I called out.

He paid no attention but plowed ahead.

"General!"

Still he wouldn't turn his head.

"Boss. Chief. Hey, *you*!"

He looked up. *"Winkled tupponies?"* he queried.

"Huh?"

Alice said, "Close your mouth before your plate falls out, and come along."

We got to the excavation's edge before the crowd became too thick to penetrate. It was about thirty feet across and sloped steeply down to the center, which was about twenty feet deep. Exactly in the middle reared an enormous, blackened and burning plant. Talk about Jack and your beanstalk—this *was* a cornstalk, ears, leaves and all, and it was at least fifty feet high. It leaned perilously and would, if touched with a finger, fall flaming to the ground. Right on top of us, too, if it happened to be toppling our way. Its roots

were as exposed as the plumbing of a half-demolished tenement.

The dirt had been flung away from them and piled up around the hole to complete the crater-like appearance of the excavation. It looked as if a meteor had plowed into the ground.

That's what I thought at first glance. Then I saw from the way the dirt was scattered that the meteor must have come up from below.

THERE was no time to think through the full implications of what I saw, for the huge cornstalk began its long-delayed fall. I was busy, along with everybody else, in running away. After it had fallen with a great crash, and after a number of the oddly dressed men had hitched it up to a ten-horse team and dragged it away to one side, I returned with Alice. This time I went down into the crater. The soil was hard and dry under my feet. Something had sucked all the water out and had done it fast, too, for the dirt in the adjoining meadow was moist from a recent shower.

Despite the heat containcd in the hole, the Scrambled Men swarmed in and began working with shovels and picks upon the western wall. Their leader, the man with the admiral's hat, stood in their middle and held the map before him with both hands, while he frowned blackly at it. Every once in a while he'd summon a subordinate with a lordly gesture, point out something on the map, and then designate a spot for him to use his shovel.

"Olderen croakish richbags," he commanded.

"Eniatipac nom, iuo, iuo," chanted the subordinate.

But the digging turned up nothing they were looking for. And the people standing on the lip of the crater—like the big city crowds that watch steam-shovel excavating—hooted and howled and shouted unheeded advice at the Scrambled Men. They passed bottles of Brew back and forth and had a good time, though I thought some of their helpful hints to the workers were definitely in bad taste.

Suddenly, the semi-Napoleon snorted with rage and threw his hands up so the map fluttered through the air.

"Shimsham the rodtammed shipshuts!" he howled.

"Rerheuf niem, lohwaj!" his men agreed.

"Frammistab the wormbattened frigatebarns!"

The result of all this was that everybody quit digging except for one man, dressed in a plug hat and two dozen slave bracelets, who dropped a seed of some sort within a six-foot-deep hole cut almost horizontally into the bank. He filled this with dirt, tamped it,

then drove a thin wire down through the soil. Another man, wearing harlequin spectacles in which the glass had been knocked out and a spiked Prussian officer's helmet from the First World War, withdrew the wire and poured a cascade of Brew from a huge vase. The thirsty soil gulped it eagerly.

There was silence as the Scrambled Men and the spectators intently watched the ceremony. Suddenly a woman on the excavation's edge shouted, "He's putting in too much again! Stop the fool!"

The Napoleon looked up fiercely and reprimanded, *"Fornicoot the onus squeered."*

Immediately, the ground rumbled, the earth shook, the crust quivered. Something was about to pop, and it was going to pop loudly!

"Run for the hills! This time he's really done it!"

I didn't know what he'd done, but it didn't seem a time to be standing around asking questions.

WE ran up the slope and out onto the meadow and across it. When we were halfway to the road, I overcame the contagious panic long enough to risk a glance over my shoulder. And I saw *it.*

You've beard of explosions flowering? Well, this was the first time I bad ever seen the reverse—a colossal sunflower exploding, energized and accelerated fantastically in its growth by an overdose of that incredible stimulant, the Brew. It attained the size of a Sequoia within a split-second, its stalk and head blasting the earth in their hurry to get out. It was reaching high into the sky and burning, because of the tremendous energy poured out in its growth.

And then, its lower parts having been denied a grip because its foundations had been thrust aside, it was toppling, toppling, a flaming tower of destruction.

Aimed exactly at us!

Alice and I got out of the way, but we barely made it and, for a second, I was sure that that titanic blazing bulk would smash us like beetles beneath a bard leather heel.

It went *whoosh!* And then *karoomp!* And we fell forward, stunned, unable to move. Or so we thought. The next instant we both leaped from our paralysis, bare rumps blistered.

Alice screamed. "Oh, God, Dan! It hurts!"

I knew that, for I had been burned, too, in that particular region. I think our expedition would have come to a bad end right then and there, for we needed immediate medical attention and would have had to go back to HQ to get it. These primitives had evidently forgotten all knowledge of up-to-date healing.

True enough—but they had forgotten because they no longer needed the knowledge. Attracted by our pitiful plight, two men stepped up and, before I could object, had thrown the contents of two buckets over our backs.

I yelped with terror, but had no place to run except back into the fire. Even the Brew was better than that. And I didn't get any in or even near my mouth.

Nevertheless, I was going to protest angrily at tbis horseplay while we were in such agony. But before I could say anything, I no longer felt pain.

I couldn't see what was happening to me, but I could see Alice's reaction. Her back was toward me and she had quit whimpering.

Beneath the moist film of Brew, the blisters had fallen off and a new and healthy pink shone through.

VI

ALICE was so overcome, she even forgot her feud with me long enough to put her head on my chest and weep, "Oh, Dan, Dan, isn't it wonderful?"

I didn't want to give this evil drug too much credit. After all, like any narcotic, it had its beneficial effects if used correctly, but it could be horribly vicious if mishandled.

I said, "Come on, we have to go back," and I took her hand and led her to the new crater. I felt I *must* solve the puzzle of the Scrambled Men. And I thought of the credit I'd get for suggesting a new method of warfare—dropping bombcases filled with Brew and seeds from balloons. And what about cannon shooting shells whose propulsive power would also be seed and Brew? Only—how would you clean the cannon out afterward? You'd have to have a tree surgeon attached to every artillery team. Of course, you could use the rocket principle for your missiles. Only—wouldn't a Brobdingnagian pansy or cornstalk trailing out behind create an awful drag and a suddenly added weight? Wouldn't you have to train botanists to be aerodynamicists, or vice versa, and . . . ?

I rejected the whole idea. The brass at HQ would never believe me.

The Scrambled Men worked quickly and efficiently and with all the added vigor Brew-drinking gave. Inside of fifteen minutes, they had put out the fire and had then pulled the smoldering trunk out of the way. They at once began digging into the slopes and bottom of the excavation.

I watched them and quickly found out that, though they seemed to be obeying the orders of the man in the admiral's hat, and were continually conferring with

him and their fellow workers, not a single one could understand what the other was saying. All effective communication was done by facial expressions and gestures. Yet none would admit that to any of the others.

Well, I thought, this was scarcely a novelty, though I had never seen it carried out on such a thorough scale. And what—or who—was responsible?

Again, wearily this time, I asked a spectator what was going on. These people seemed to be incapable of making a serious statement, but there was always the chance that I'd find somebody who was an exception.

"I'll tell you, stranger. These men are living evidences of the fact that it doesn't pay to fight Mahrud, bull be his name, or try to corrupt his religion for your own purposes."

HE drank from a flask he carried on a chain around his neck and then offered me a slug. He looked surprised at my refusal, but took no offense.

"These were the leaders of the community just before Mahrud manifested himself as the Real Bull. You know—preachers, big and little businessmen, newspaper editors, gamblers, lawyers, bankers, union business agents, doctors, book reviewers, college professors, the men who are supposed to know how to cure your diseases social, economic, financial, administrative, psychological, spiritual, and so on, into the deep dark night. They knew the Right Word, comprehend? The Word that'd set Things straight, understand?

"The only trouble was that after the Brew began to flow freely, nobody who'd drunk from the Holy Bottle would pay any attention to them. These pillars of the community tried hard for a long time. Then, seeing which way the tide was inevitably foaming, they decided that maybe they'd better get in on a good thing. After all, if everybody was doing it, it must be the correct thing to do.

"So, after drinking enough Brew to give them courage, but not enough to change them into ordinary fun-loving but Mahrud-fearing citizens, they announced they were the prophets of a new religion. And from then on, according to their advertisements, none but them was fit to run the worship of the Big Bull. Of course, Sheed the Weather Prophet and Polivinosel and the Allegory ignored them, and they were denounced as false gods.

"Makes you laugh, doesn't it? But that's the way it goes. And that's the way it went until Mahrud—bibulous be his people forever—got mad and announced, through Sheed, that these pillars of the community were just dummy-

prophets, fakes and that, as punishment, he was going to give them a gift, as he had earlier done to the Dozen Diapered Darlings.

"So he said, in effect, 'You've been telling the people that you, and only you, have possession of the Real Bull, the Right Word. Well, you'll have it. Only it'll be the Word that nobody but you can understand, and to every other man it'll be a strange tongue. Now—scram!'

"But after he'd watched these poor characters stumbling around trying to talk to each other and the people and getting madder than the hops in the Brew or else sadder than the morning after, Mahrud felt sorry. So he said, 'Look, I'll give you a chance. I've hidden the key to your troubles somewhere in this valley. Search for it. If you find it, you'll be cured, and everybody will understand you, understand?'

"So he gave them a map—all of them, mind you—but this half-dressed Napoleon here grabbed the map and he kept it by virtue of being the most un-understandable of the bunch. And, ever since, he's been directing the search for the key that'll unscramble them." He shook his head.

"That's why they're doing all this blasting and digging?" I asked, dazed.

"Yes, they're following the map," he said, laughing.

I THANKED him and walked up behind the man with the admiral's hat and the sword. I looked over his shoulder. It was covered with long squiggly lines and many shorter branches. These, I supposed, were the lines he was following in his creekbed-making.

He looked around at me. *"Symfrantic gangleboys?"*

"You said it," I choked, and then I had to turn and walk away. "That map is a chart of the human nervous system," I gasped to Alice. "And he's following one of the branches of the vagus nerve."

"The wandering nerve," murmured Alice. "But what could all this mean?"

As we began our climb from the pit, I said, "I think we're seeing the birth-pangs of a new mythology. One of the demigods is based upon a famous comic strip character. Another is formed in the image of a pun on the translation of his name—though his new form does correspond to his lustful, asinine character. And we see that the chief deity bases his worship—and at least one of his epiphanies—on his mortal nickname. All this makes me wonder upon what foundations the old-time pantheons and myths were built. Were they also originally based on such incongruous and unlikely features?"

"Daniel Temper!" Alice snapped. "You talk as if you believed

the old pagan gods once existed and as if you believed this Mahrud actually is a god!"

"Before I came bere, I'd have laughed at any such theory," I said. "How do *you* explain wbat you've seen?"

We climbed up in silence. At the edge, I turned for one more glimpse of the Scrambled Men, the object lesson designed by Mabrud. They were digging just as busily as ever and paying no attention to the ribald comments of the spectators. The funny thing about this, I thought, was that these unscrambled men bad not yet caught on to the fact that the Scrambled Men were more than a wacky sect, that they were symbols of what the spectators must themselves do if they wisbed to travel beyond their own present carefree and happy but unprogressive state.

As plainly as the ears on the head of the Ass-God, the plight of these frantically digging sons of Babel said to everybody, "Look within yourselves to find the key."

The peculiar tbing about that advice was that it was probably uttered by the first philosopher among the cavemen.

I caught the glint of something metallic almost buried in tbe dirt of the slope. I went back and picked it up. It was a long-handled silver screwdriver.

If I hadn't known my old teacber so well, I don't think I ever would have understood its presence. But I'd been bombarded in his classes for four years with his bizarre methods of putting things over. So I knew that I held in my hand another of his serious jokes—a utensil designed to take its place in tbe roster of myths springing up within this Valley Olympus.

You had the legend of Pandora's Box, of Philemon and Baucis' Pitcher, Medusa's Face, Odin's Pledged Eye. Why not the Silver Screwdriver?

I EXPLAINED to Alice. "Remember the gag about the boy who was born with a golden screw in his navel and how all his life he wondered what it was for and how ashamed he was because be was different from everybody else and had to keep it hidden? Remember how be finally found a doctor who told him to go home and dream of the fairy queen? And how Titania slid down on a moonbeam and gave him a silver screwdriver? And how, when he'd unscrewed tbe golden screw from his navel, he felt so happy about being normal and being able to marry without making his bride laugh at him? Remember he then forgot all bis vain speculations upon the purpose of that golden screw? And how, very happy, he got up from his chair to reach for a cigarette and his derrière, deprived of its

former fastening, dropped off?"

"You don't mean it!" she breathed.

"But I do! How do we know the tale of the golden apples or the golden fleece didn't have their origin in jokes and that they later acquired actual and at the same time symbolic significance?"

She had no answer to that, any more than anybody did.

"Aren't you going to give it to the Scrambled Men?" she asked. "It'd save them all this blasting and digging. And they could settle down and quit talking gibberish."

"I imagine they've stumbled over it a hundred times before and kicked it to one side, refusing to recognize its meaning."

"Yes, but what does it mean?"

Exasperatedly, I said, "It's another clue to the fact that they ought to look within themselves, that they ought to consider the nature of their punishment and the lesson to be derived from it."

We walked away. The whole incident had left me plunged in gloom. I seemed to be getting deeper and deeper into a murk furnished by a being who, in the far dim background, mocked me. Was it mere coincidence that we'd been met by the Allegory, that he'd given us his vaguely ominous advice?

I didn't have much time to think, for we came to the side road which led to the state hospital. I could look down it and see the white stones of the cemetery outside the high wire fence. I must have stood there longer than I thought, because Alice said, "What's the matter?"

"The state hospital cemetery is just inside the fence. The Meltonville cemetery is on the other side. My father is buried in the state grounds; my mother lies in the village's. They are separated in death, as they were in life."

"Dan," she said softly, "we ought to get a few hours' sleep before we go on. We've walked a long way. Why don't we visit your parents' graves and then sleep there? Would you like that?"

"Very much. Thank you for the thought, Alice." The words came hard. "You're a pretty wonderful person."

"Not so much. It's merely the decent thing to do."

She would have to say that just when I was beginning to feel a little warmer toward her.

VII

WE went down the road. A big red-haired man walked toward us. He was all eyes for Alice, so much so that I expected the same sort of trouble we'd had with Polivinosel. But when he looked at me, he stopped, grinned and burst into loud howls of laughter. As he passed me, I smelled his

breath. It was loaded with the Brew.

"What's the matter with *him?*"

"I don't know," said Alice, looking at me. "Wait a minute. Of course! Polivinosel and the others must have known all the time that you were an Outsider!"

"Why?"

"Because you're bald! Have we seen any bald men? No! That's why this fellow laughed!"

"If that's so, I'm marked! All Polivinosel has to do is have his worshipers look for a skinhead."

"Oh, it's not that bad," she said. "You have to remember that Outsiders are constantly coming in, and that any number of ex-soldiers are in the process of changing. You could pass for one of those." She grabbed my hand. "Oh, well, come along, let's get some sleep. Then we can think about it."

We came to the cemetery entrance. The shrubbery on either side of the stone arch had grown higher than my head. The iron gate in the arch was wide open and covered with rust. Inside, however, I did not see the expected desolate and wild expanse of tall weeds. They were kept trimmed by the goats and sheep that stood around like silvery statues in the moonlight.

I gave a cry and ran forward.

My mother's grave gaped like a big brown mouth. There was black water at the bottom and her coffin was tilted on end. Evidently it bad been take nout and then slid carelessly back in. Its lid was open. It was empty.

Behind me, Alice said, "Easy, Dan. There's no cause for looking so alarmed."

"So *this* is your splendid people, Alice, the gods and nymphs of the New Golden Age. Grave-robbers! *Ghouls*!"

"I don't think so. They'd have no need or desire for money and jewels. Let's look around. There must be some other explanation."

We looked. We found Weepenwilly.

HE was sitting with his back against a tombstone. He was so large and dark and quiet that he seemed to be cast out of bronze, a part of the monument itself. He looked like Rodin's *Thinker*—a *Thinker* wearing a derby hat and white loincloth. But there was something alive about him and, when he raised his head, we saw tears glistening in the moonlight.

"Could you tell me," I asked excitedly, "why all these graves are dug up?"

"Bless you, me bhoy," he said in a slight brogue. "Sure now, and have you a loved one buried here?"

"My mother," I said. My father was on the other side of the fence.

His tears flowed faster. "Faith, bhoy, and is it so? Then you'll be

happy when I tell you the glorious news. Me own dear wife was buried here, you know."

I didn't see anything about that to make me happy, but I kept quiet and waited.

"Yes, me bhoy—you'll pardon my calling you that, won't you? After all, I was a veteran o' the Spanish-American War and I outrank you by quite a few years. In fact, if it hadn't been for the blessed ascent o' Mahrud—may he stub his divine toe and fall on his glorious face, bless him—I would now be dead of old age and me bones resting in the boat along with me wife's, and so—"

"What boat?" I interrupted.

"What *boat*? Where have you been? Ah, yes, you're new." He pointed his finger at his head, to indicate my baldness, I suppose.

"Faith, bhoy, you must hurry to Onaback in the morning and see the boatload o' bones leave. 'Twill be big doings then, you can count on that, with lots o' Brew and barbecued beef and pork and enough love-making to last you for a week."

After repeated questioning, I learned that Mahrud had had the remains of the dead in all the graveyards of the Area dug up and transported to Onaback. The next day, a boat carrying the bones would cross the Illinois and deposit the load upon the eastern shore. What would happen after that, not even the minor gods knew—or else would not tell—but everybody was sure that Mahrud intended to bring the dead back to life. And everybody was thronging into the city to witness such an event.

That news made we feel better. If there were to be many people on the roads and in the city itself, then it would be easy to stay lost in the crowds.

THE man with the derby said, "As sure as they call me Weepenwilly, children, the All-Bull is going too far. He'll try to raise the dead and he won't be able to do it. And then where will the people's faith in him be? Where will *I* be?"

He sobbed, "I'll be out o' work again, me position lost—me that served the Old God faithfully until I saw He was losing ground and that Mahrud was the up-and-coming deity nowadays, a god such as they had in the ancient days in Erin when gods was gods and men was giants. But now Mahrud—bull be his name, curse him—will lose face and he'll never get it back. Then I'll be that most miserable o' all things, a prophet without honor. What's worse, I was just about to be promoted to a hemi-semi-demigod—I've been coming up fast all on account o' me faithful and hard work and keeping me mouth shut—when this

big promotional stunt has to enter the All-Bull's head. Why can't he leave well enough alone?"

At last, I got it out of him that he wasn't so much afraid Mahrud would fail as he was that he might succeed.

"If Mahrud does clothe the old bones with fresh flesh, me everloving wife will be out looking for me, and me life won't be worth a pre-Brew nickel. She'll never forget nor forgive that 'twas I who pushed her down those steps ten years ago and broke her stringy neck. 'Twill make no difference to her that she'll come back better than ever, with a lovely new figure and a pretty face instead of that hatchet. Not her, the black-hearted, stone-livered wrath o' God!

"Sure and I've had an unhappy life ever since the day I opened me innocent blue eyes—untainted except for the old original sin, but Mahrud says that's no dogma o' his—and first saw the light o' day. Unhappy I've been and unhappy I'll live. I can't even taste the sweet sting o' death—because, as sure as the sun rises in the east, as sure as Durham became a bull and swam the Illinois with the lovely Peggy on his back and made her his bride there upon the high bluffs—I can't even die because me everloving wife would search out me bones and ship them to Mahrud and be standing there facing me when I arose."

I WAS getting weary of listening to this flow of hyperbole, interminable as the Illinois itself. I said, "Thank you, Mr. Weepenwilly, and good night. We've got a long trip ahead of us."

"Sure, me bhoy, and that's not me given name. 'Tis a nickname given me by the bhoys down at the town hall because . . ."

I heard no more. I went back to my mother's grave and lay down by it. I couldn't get to sleep, because Alice and Weepenwilly were talking. Then, just as I'd managed almost to drop off, Alice sat down and insisted on retelling me the story Weepenwilly had told her.

I'd seen his white loin-cloth, hadn't I? Well, if Weepenwilly had stood up, I'd have perceived the three-cornered fold of it. And I'd have seen its remarkable resemblance to early infant apparel. That resemblance was not coincidental, for Weepenwilly was one of the Dozen Diapered Darlings.

Moreover, if he had stood up, I'd have noticed the yellow glow that emanated from his posterior, the nimbus so much like a firefly's in color and position.

It seemed that, shortly after the Brew began taking full effect, when the people of Onaback had turned their backs to the outside world, numerous self-styled prophets had tried to take advantage of the new religion, each with his own variation of an as-yet-misunder-

stood creed. Among them had been twelve politicians who had long been bleeding the city's treasury. Because it was some time before the Bottle's contents began affecting the nature of things noticeably, they had not been aware at first of what was happening.

The wheels of industry slowed by degrees. Grass and trees suhtly encroached upon pavement. People gradually lost interest in the cares of life. Inhihitions were imperceptihly dissolved. Enmities and bitternesses and diseases faded. The terrors, burdens and boredoms of life burned away as magically as the morning mist under the rising sun.

A time came when people quit flying to Chicago for business or pleasure, when nohody went to the library to take out books, when the typographers and reporters of the daily newspapers failed to show up for work, when the Earthgripper Diesel Company and Myron Malker's Distillery—biggest on earth of their kind, both of them—hlew the final whistle, when people everywhere seemed to realize that all had been wrong with the world, hut that it was going to be fine and dandy in the future.

ABOUT then, the mail-carriers quit, and frantic telegrams and letters were sent to Washington and the state capital—though from other towns, hecause the local operators had quit. This was when the Food and Drug Administration and the Internal Revenue Bureau and the F.B.I. sent agents into Onahack to investigate. These agents did not come back and others were sent in, only to succumb to the Brew.

The Brew had not yet reached its full potency, when Durham had just revealed himself, through the prophet Sheed, as Mahrud. There was still some opposition and the most vigorous came from the twelve politicians. They organized a meeting in the courthouse square and urged the people to follow them in an attack on Mahrud. First they would march on Trayhell University, where Sheed lived in the Meteorological Building.

"Then," said one of the twelve, shaking his fist at the long thin line of Brew geysering from the Bottle up on the hills, "we'll lynch this mad scientist who calls himself Mahrud, this lunatic we know is a crazed university professor and a reader of poetry and philosophy. Friends, citizens, Americans, if this Mahrud is indeed a god, as Sheed, another mad scientist claims, let him strike me with lightning! My friends and I dare him to!"

The dozen were standing on a platform in the courthouse yard. They could look down Main Street and across the river to the hills.

They faced the east defiantly. No bellowings came, no lightnings. But in the next instant, the dozen were forced to flee ignominiously, never again to defy the All-Bull.

Alice giggled. "They were struck by an affliction which was not as devastating as lightning nor as spectacular. But it was far more demoralizing. Mahrud wished on them a disability which required them to wear diapers for much the same reason babies do. Of course, this convinced the Dozen Diapered Darlings. But that brassy-nerved bunch of ex-ward-heelers switched right around and said they'd known all along that Mahrud was the Real Bull. They'd called the meeting so they could make a dramatic announcement of their change of heart. Now he'd given them a monopoly on divine revelation. If anybody wanted to get in touch with him, let them step up and pay on the line. They still hadn't realized that money was no good any more.

"They even had the short-sightedness and the crust to pray to Mahrud for a special sign to prove their prophethood. And the All-Bull did send them signs of their sanctity. He gave them permanent halos, blazing yellow lights."

SITTING up and hugging her knees, Alice rocked back and forth with laughter. "Of course, the Dozen should have been ecstatically happy. But they weren't. For Mahrud had slyly misplaced their halos, locating them in a place where, if the Darlings wished to demonstrate their marks of saintliness, they would be forced to stand up.

"And, would you believe it, this thick-headed Dozen refuses to admit that Mahrud has afflicted them. Instead, they brag continually about the uniqueness of their halos' locations, and they attempt to get everybody else to wear diapers because, they say, a towel around the middle is as much a sign of a true believer in Mahrud as a turban or fez is that of a believer in Allah.

"Naturally, their real reason is that they don't want to be conspicuous. Not that they mind being outstanding. It's just that they don't want people to be reminded of their disability or their original sin."

Tears ran from her eyes. She choked with laughter.

I failed to see anything funny about it, and I told her so.

"You don't get it, Temper," she said. She always used my last name when she was displeased with me. "This condition is curable. All the Darlings have to do is pray to Mahrud to be relieved of it, and they will be. But their pride won't let them. They insist it's a benefit and a sign of the Bull's favor. They suffer, yes, but

they like to suffer, just as Weepenwilly likes to sit on his wife's tombstone—as if that'd keep her under the ground—and wail about his misfortune. He and his kind wouldn't give up their punishment for the world—literally."

She began laughing loudly again. I sat up and grabbed her shoulders and pulled her close to smell her breath. There was no hint of the Brew, so she hadn't been drinking from Weepenwilly's bottle. She was suffering from hysteria, plain and simple.

The normal procedure for bringing a woman back to normality is to slap her resoundingly upon the cheek. But in this case Alice turned the tables by slapping me first—resoundingly. The effect was the same. She quit laughing and glared at me.

I held my stinging cheek. "What's that for?"

"For trying to take advantage of me," she said.

I was so angry and taken aback that I could only stutter, "Why, I—why, I—"

"Just keep your hands to yourself," she snapped. "Don't mistake my sympathy for love. Or think, because these Brew-bums have no inhibitions or discrimination, that I've succumbed to the general atmosphere."

I turned my back on her and closed my eyes. But the longer I lay there, and the more I thought of her misinterpretation, the madder I became. Finally, boiling within, I sat up and said tightly, "Alice!"

She must not have been sleeping either, for she raised at once and stared at me, eyes big. "What—what is it?"

"I forgot to give you this." I let her have it across the side of her face. Then, without waiting to see the effect of my blow, I lay down and turned my back again. For a minute, I'll admit, my spine was cold and tense, waiting for the nails to rake down my naked skin.

VIII

BUT nothing like that happened. First there was the sort of silence that lives. Then, instead of the attack, came a racking of breath, followed by sobs, which sloped off into snifflings and the wiping of tears.

I stood it as long as I could. Then I sat up again and said, "All right, so maybe I shouldn't have hit you. But you had no business taking it for granted that I was trying to make love to you. Look, I know I'm repulsive to you, but that's all the more reason why I wouldn't be making a pass at you. I have some pride. And you don't exactly drive me out of my mind with passion, you know. What makes you think you're any

Helen of Troy or Cleopatra?"

There I went. I was always trying to smooth things over, and every time I ended by roughing them up. Now she was mad and she showed it by getting up and walking off. I caught her as she reached the cemetery gate.

"Where do you think you're going?" I asked.

"Down to the foot of Main Street, Onaback, Illinois, and I'm bottling a sample of the Brew there. Then I'm reporting to my father as soon as possible."

"You little fool, you can't do that. You're supposed to stick with me."

She tossed her long black hair. "My orders don't say I have to. If, in my opinion, your presence becomes a danger to my mission, I may leave you. And I think you're a definite danger—if not to my mission, at least to me!"

I grabbed her wrist and whirled her around. "You're acting like a little girl, not like a major in the U.S. Marines! What's the matter with you?"

She tried to jerk her wrist loose. That made me madder, but when her fist struck me, I saw red. I wasn't so blinded that I couldn't find her cheek again with the flat of my hand. Then she was on me with a hold that would have broken my arm if I hadn't applied the counter-hold and then I had her down on her side with both of her arms caught behind her back. This was where a good little man was better than a good big girl.

"All right," I gritted, "what is it?"

She wouldn't reply. She twisted frantically, though she knew she couldn't get loose and groaned with frustration.

"Is it the same thing that's wrong with me?"

She quit struggling and said, very softly, "Yes, that's it."

I RELEASED her arms. She rolled over on her back, but she didn't try to get up. "You mean," I said, still not able to believe it, "that you're in love with me, just as I am with you?"

She nodded again. I kissed her with all the pent-up desire that I'd been taking out on her in physical combat a moment ago.

I said, "I still can't believe it. It was only natural for me to fall in love with you, even if you did act as if you hated my guts, but why did you fall in love with me? Or, if you can't answer that, why did you ride me?"

"You won't like this," she said. "I could give you the factors a psychologist would point out. Both college graduates, professional people, interested in the arts and so on. That wouldn't take in the differences, of course. But what does that matter? It happened.

"I didn't want it to. I fought against it. And I used the reverse of the old Jamesian principle that, if you pretend to be something or to like something, you will be that something or like that something. I tried to act as if I loathed you."

"Why?" I demanded. She turned her head away, but I took her chin and forced her to face me. "Let's have it."

"You know I was nasty about your being bald. Well, I didn't really dislike that. Just the opposite—I loved it. And that was the whole trouble. I analyzed my own case and decided I loved you because I had a bad Electra complex. I—"

"You mean," I said, my voice rising, "that because I was bald like your father and somewhat older than you, you fell for me?"

"Well, no, not really. I mean that's what I told myself so I'd get over it. That helped me to pretend to hate you so that I might end up doing so."

Flabbergasted was no word for the way I felt. If I hadn't been lying on the ground, I'd have been floored. Alice Lewis was one of those products of modern times, so psychology conscious that she tended to regard an uninhibited affection of parent and child as a sign that both ought to rush to the nearest psychoanalyst.

"I'm in a terrible fix," said Alice. "I don't know if you fulfill my father-image or if I'm genuinely in love with you. I think I am, yet . . ."

SHE put her hand up to stroke my naked scalp. Knowing what I did, I resented the caress. I started to jerk my head away, but she clamped her hand on it and exclaimed, "Dan, your scalp's *fuzzy!*"

I said, "Huh?" and ran my own palm over my head. She was right. A very light down covered my baldness.

"So," I said, delighted and shocked at the same time, "that's what that nymph meant when she pointed at my head and said that if it weren't for *that*, she'd think I hadn't tasted the Brew yet! The Brew that fellow poured on my head—*that's* what did it!"

I jumped up and shouted, "Hooray!"

And scarcely had the echoes died down than there was an answering call, one that made my blood chill. This was a loud braying laugh from far off, a bellowing hee-haw!

"Polivinosel!" I said. I grabbed Alice's hand, lifted her up and we fled down the road. Nor did we stop until we had descended the hill that runs down into U.S. Route 24. There, puffing and panting from the half-mile run and thirstier than ever, we walked toward

the city of Onaback, another half-mile away.

I looked back from time to time, but I saw no sign of the Ass. That was no guarantee he wasn't on our trail, however. He could have been lost in the great mass of people we'd encountered. These carried baskets and bottles and torches and were, as I found out from conversation with a man, latecomers going to view the departure of the bone-boat from the foot of Main Street.

"Rumor says that Mahrud—may bis name be bull—will raise the dead at the foot of the hill the Fountain of the Bottle spurts from. Whether that's so or not, we'll all have fun. Barbecue, Brew and bundling make the world go round."

I couldn't argue with that statement. They certainly were the principal amusements of the natives.

DURING our progress down Adams Street, I learned much about the valley's setup. My informant was very talkative, as were all of his fellow Brew-drinkers. He told me tbat the theocracy began on the lowest plane with his kind, Joe Doe. Then there were the prayermen. These received the petitions of the populace, sorted them out, and passed on those that needed attention to prophets like the Dozen Diapered Darlings and the Forecaster Sheed, who screened them, and then, in turn, tbey were relayed to demigods like Polivinosel, Albert Allegory, and a dozen others I had not heard of before then. These reported directly to Mahrud or Peggy.

Mahrud handled godhood like big business. He had delegated various departments to his vice-presidents such as the Ass, who handled fertility, and Sheed, who was probably the happiest forecaster who'd ever lived. Once a professor of physics at Traybell and the city's meteorologist, Sheed was now the only weather man whose propbecies were one hundred per cent correct. There was a good reason for that. He made the weather.

All this was very interesting, but my mind wasn't as intent on the information as it should have been. For one thing, I kept looking back to see if Polivinosel was following us. For another, I worried about Alice's attitude toward me. Now that I had hair, would she stop loving me? Was it a—now I was doing it—fixation that attracted her to me, or was it a genuine affection?

If my situation hadn't been so tense, I'd have laughed at myself. Who would have thought that some day I might not leap with joy at the possibility of once again having a full head of hair and a

beautiful girl in love with me?

The next moment, I did leap. It was not from joy, however. Somebody behind me had given a loud braying laugh. There was no mistaking the Ass's hee-haw. I whirled and saw, blazing golden in both the light of the moon and the torches, the figure of Polivinosel galloping toward us. There were people in the way, but they ran to get out of his path, yelling as they did so. His hoofs rang on the pavement even above their cries. Then he was on us and bellowing, "What now, little man? What now?"

JUST as he reached us, I fell flat on my face. He was going so fast, he couldn't stop. His hoofs didn't help him keep his balance, nor did Alice when she shoved him. Over he went, into a group of women carrying bottles and baskets of fruit and corn and little cages of chickens. Women shrieked, baskets flew, glass broke, chickens squawked and shot out of sprung doors—Polivinosel was buried in the whole mass.

Alice and I burst through the crowd, turned a corner and raced down to Washington Street, which ran parallel to Adams. There was a much smaller parade of pilgrims here, but it was better than nothing. We ducked among these while, a block away, the giant throat of the Ass called again and again, "Little man, what now? What now, little man?"

I could have sworn he was galloping toward us. Then his voice, mighty as it was, became smaller, and the fast cloppety-clop died away.

Panting, Alice and I walked down Washington. We noticed that the three bridges across the Illinois had been destroyed. A native told us that Mahrud had wrecked them with lightning one stormy night.

"Not that he needed to worry about crossing to the other side," he said, swiftly making the sign of the bull. "All of what used to be East Onaback is now sacred to the owner of the Bottle."

His attitude verified what I had noticed already. These people, though uninhibited by the Brew in other respects, retained enough awe to give the higher gods plenty of privacy. Whatever the priests relayed to them was enough to keep them happy.

When we came to the foot of Main Street, which ran right into the Illinois, we looked for a place to rest. Both of us were bone-weary. It was almost dawn. We had to have some sleep if we wanted to be at all efficient for our coming work.

First, though, we had to watch the Fountain. This was a thin arc of the Brew which rose from the Bottle, set on top of the bluffs across the river from Onaback, and ended in the middle of the

waters. The descending moon played a rainbow of wavering and bright colors along it. How that trick was done, I didn't know, but it was one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen.

I studied it and concluded that some force was being exerted linearly to keep the winds from scattering it into a fine spray. And I saw how easy it would be to locate the Bottle. Follow the fountain to its source, a mile and a half away. Then destroy it, so the power of the Bull would be gone. After that, sit back and watch the Marines glide in and begin the conquest of Onaback.

It was as simple as that.

We looked around some more and found a place on the riverside park to lie down. Alice, snuggling in my arms, said, "Dan, I'm awfully thirsty. Are you?"

I admitted that I was, but that we'd have to stand it. Then I said, "Alice, after you get your sample, are you going to hike right back to H.Q.?"

"No," she said, kissing my chest, "I'm not. I'm sticking with you. After all, I want to see if your hair turns out curly or straight. And don't tell me!"

"I won't. But you're going to get awfully thirsty before this assignment is over."

Secretly, I was pleased. If she wanted to be with me, then my returning hair wasn't putting a road-block in the course of true love. Maybe it was the real thing, not just something laid by a trauma and hatched by a complex. Maybe . . .

THERE I was in the tavern in the little town of Croncruacbshin. I'd just fulfilled my mother's death-bed wish that I visit her mother, who was living when I stepped aboard the plane for Ireland and died the day I set foot on the green sod.

After the funeral, I'd stopped in Bill O'basean's for a bite, and Bill, who was wearing horns like a Texas steer's, picked the bottle off the shelf where he kept his other curios and bellowed, "Danny Temper, look at the bull on the side o' that piece of glass! Know what that means? 'Tis the bottle that Goibniu, the smith o' the gods, fashioned. 'Twill run forever with magical brew for him that knows the words, for him that has a god hidden within himself."

"What happened to the owner?" I said, and he answered, "Sure and bejasus, all the Old Ones—Erse and Greek and Dutch and Roosbian and Chinee and Indian—found they was crowdin' each other, so they had a trooce and left Airth and went elsewhere. Only Pan stayed here for a few centuries, and he flew away on the wings o' light when the

New Ones came. He didn't die as the big mouths claim.

"And then, in the eighteenth century, the New Ones, who'd become Old Ones now, thought that, begorry, they'd better be leavin', too, now that they was crowdin' each other and makin' a mess o' things. But the Bottle o' Goibniu has been lyin' around bere collectin' dust and stories and here ye are, my bboy, for ten American dollars, and what do ye intend doin' with it?"

So I said, "I'll wrap it up and send it on to my old professor as a joke. It'll tickle him wben I tell him it's for sure the genuine everflowing bottle o' Goibniu."

And Bill O'basean winked and said, "And bim a teetotaller. What'll his wife, the old hag and wicked witch, say to that?"

And I said, "Wouldn't it be funny if the old prof thought this really was Goibniu's bottle?"

And Bill, who had now become the Rational Man, looked severely at me and said to the squirrel crouched on his sboulder, "O Nuciferous One, what this simpleton don't know nobow! Hasn't be intellect enough, begorry, to see that the bottle was destined from its making for Boswell Durham? *Bos,* which is Latin for the bovine species, and *well,* a combination of the Anglo-Saxon *wiella,* meaning fountain or well-spring, *wiellan* or *wellen,* meaning to pour fortb, and the Anglo-Saxon adverb *wel,* meaning worthily or abundantly, and the adjective, meaning healthy. Boswell—the fountaining, abundantly healthy bovine. And, of course, Durham. Everybody knows that that is sign and symbol for a bull."

"And he was born under Taurus too," I said.

And then the bartender, wbo was bald Alice by now—bald, alas!—handed me the Bottle. "Here, have a drink on the house." And then I was on the steeply sloping rooftop and sliding fast toward the edge. "Drink, drink, drink!" screamed Alice. "Or you're lost, lost, lost!"

But I wouldn't do it, and I awoke moaning, with the sun in my eyes and Alice sbaking me and saying, "Dan, Dan, wbat's the matter?"

I TOLD her about my dream and how it was mixed up with things that bad actually happened. I told her how I had bought this bottle from O'basean and sent it to the Professor as a hoax. But sbe didn't pay mucb attention because, like me, she had one thing uppermost in the cells of both body and mind, and that was thirst. It was a living lizard with a bot rough skin that forced its swelling body down our throats and pulsed there, sucking moisture from us with every breath.

She licked her dry, cracked lips and then, glancing wistfully toward the river, where bathers shouted and plunged with joy, asked, "I don't suppose it'd burt me if I sat in it, do you?"

"Be careful," I said, my words rattling like pebbles in a dried gourd. I ached to join her, but I couldn't even get near the water. I was having trouble enough combatting the panic that came with the odor of the Brew blowing from the river.

While she waded out until the water was hip-deep and cupped it in her hands and poured it over her breasts, I examined my surroundings in the daylight. To my left was a warehouse and a wbarf. Tied alongside the latter was an old coal barge that bad been painted a bright green. A number of men and women, ignoring the festivities, were busy carrying bags and long mummy-shaped bundles from the warehouse to the boat. These were the bones that had been dug up recently and, if my information was correct, they'd be ferried across to the other side after the ceremonies.

That was fine. I intended to go over with them. As soon as Alice came back out of the water, I'd unfold my plans to ber and if she thought she could go through with it, we'd . . .

A big grinning head emerged from the water just bebind Alice. It belonged to one of those jokers on every beach wbo grabs you from behind and pulls you under. I opened my mouth to yell a warning, but it was too late. I don't suppose I'd have been heard above the crowd's noise, anyway.

After sputtering and blowing the water out, she stood there with the most ecstatic expression, then bent over and began drinking great mouthfuls. That was enough for me. I was dying within, because she was now on the enemy's side, and I'd wanted so badly to do something for ber that I hurt. But I had to get going before she saw me and yelled, "Come on in, Dan, the beer's fine!"

I trotted off through the crowd, moaning to myself at losing ber, until I came to the far end of the warebouse, where she couldn't possibly see me enter. There, under the cool cavernous roof, I paused until I saw a luncb-basket sitting by a pile of bags. I scooped it up, untied one of the bags, put the basket inside, boisted the bag over my sboulder and fell, uncballenged, into the line of workers going out to the barge. As if I belonged there, I briskly carried my burden over the gangplank.

But instead of depositing it where everybody else was, I walked around the mountain of bags. Out of view on the riverside, I took the basket out and dumped the bones inside the bag over the

railing into the river. I took one peek around my hiding place. Alice was nowhere to be seen.

Satisfied she would not be able to find me, and glad that I'd not disclosed my plans to ber last nigbt, I took the basket and crawled backward into the bag.

IX

ONCE there, I succumbed to the two things that bad been fighting within me—grief and thirst. Tears ran as I thought of Alice, but at the same time, I greedily devoured, in rapid succession, an orange, a leg and breast of chicken, a half-loaf of fresh bread, and two great plums.

The fruit belped my thirst somewhat, but tbere was only one thing that could fully ease that terrible ache in my throat—water. Moreover, the bag was close and very hot. The sun beat down on it and, though I kept my face as close to the open end as I dared, I suffered. But as long as I kept sweating and could draw in some fresh air now and then, I knew I'd be all right. I wasn't going to give up when I'd gotten this far.

I croucbed within the thick leather bag like—I couldn't help thinking—an embryo within its sac. I was sweating so much that I felt as if I were floating in amniotic fluid. The outside noises came through dimly; every once in a while I'd hear a big shout.

When the workers quit the barge, I stuck my head out long enough to grab some air and look at the sun. It seemed to be about eleven o'clock, although tbe sun, like the moon, was so distorted tbat I couldn't be sure. Our scientists had said the peculiar warmth of the valley and the

elongation of the sun and moon were due to some "wave-focusing force field" hanging just below the stratosphere. This bad no more meaning than calling it a sorcerer's spell, but it had satisfied the general public and the military.

About noon, the ceremonies began. I ate the last two plums in the basket, but I didn't dare open the bottle at its bottom. Though it felt like a wine-container, I didn't want to chance the possibility that the Brew might be mixed in it.

From time to time, I heard, in-

termingled with band music, snatches of chants. Then, suddenly, the band quit playing and there was a mighty shout of, "Mahrud is Bull—Bull is all—and Sheed is the prophet!"

The band began playing the Semiramis Overture. When it was almost through, the barge trembled with an unmistakable motion. I had not heard any tug, nor did I think there was one. After all I'd seen, the idea of a boat moving by itself was just another miracle.

The overture ended in a crash of chords. Somebody yelled, "Three cheers for Albert Allegory!" and the crowd responded.

The noises died off and I could hear, faintly, the slapping of the waves against the side of the barge. For a few minutes, that was all. Then heavy footsteps sounded close by. I ducked back within the bag and lay still. The steps came very near and stopped.

The rumbling unhuman voice of The Allegory said, "Looks as if somebody forgot to tie up this bag."

Another voice said, "Oh, Al, what's the difference? Leave it alone."

I would have blessed the unknown voice except for one thing —it sounded so much like Alice's.

I'D thought that was a shock, but a big green four-fingered hand appeared in the opening of the bag's mouth and seized the cords, intending to draw them close and tie them up. At the same time, the tag, which was strung on the cord, became fixed in my vision long enough for me to read the name.

Mrs. Daniel Temper.

I had thrown my mother's bones into the river!

For some reason, this affected me more than the fact that I was now tied into a close and suffocating sack, with no knife to cut my way out.

The voice of The Allegory, strange in its alien mouth-structure, boomed out, "Well, Peggy, was your sister quite happy when you left her?"

"Alice'll be perfectly happy as soon as she finds this Dan Temper," said the voice, which I now realized was Peggy Rourke's. "After we'd kissed, as sisters should who haven't seen each other for three years, I explained everything that had happened to me. She started to tell me of her adventures, but I told her I knew most of them. She just couldn't believe that we'd been keeping tabs on her and her lover ever since they crossed the border."

"Too bad we lost track of him after Polivinosel chased them down Adams Street," said Allegory. "And if we'd been one minute earlier, we'd have caught him, too. Oh, well, we know he'll try to destroy or steal the Bottle. He'll be caught there."

"If he does get to the Bottle," said Peggy, "he'll be the first man to do so. That F.B.I. agent only got as far as the foot of the hill, remember."

"If anybody can do it," chuckled Allegory, "Dan H. Temper can. Or so says Mahrud, who should know him well enough."

"Won't Temper be surprised when he finds out that his every move since he entered Mahrudland has been not only a reality, but a symbol of that reality? And that we've been leading him by the nose through the allegorical maze?"

ALLEGORY laughed with all the force of a bull-alligator's roar.

"I wonder if Mahrud isn't asking too much of him by demanding that he read into his adventures a meaning outside of themselves. For instance, could he see that he entered this valley as a baby enters the world, bald and

toothless? Or that he met and conquered the ass that is in all of us? But that, in order to do so, he had to lose his outer strength and visible burden—the water-tank? And then operate upon his own strength with no source of external strength to fall back on? Or that, in the Scrambled Men, he met the living punishment of human self-importance in religion?"

Peggy said, "He'll die when he finds out that the real Polivinosel was down South and that you were masquerading as him."

"Well," rumbled Allegory, "I hope Temper can see that Mahrud kept Polivinosel in his asinine form as an object lesson to everybody that, if Polivinosel could become a god, then anybody could. If he can't, he's not very smart."

I was thinking that I had, strangely enough, thought that very thing about the Ass—and then the cork in the bottle in the basket decided to pop and the contents—Brew—gushed out over my side.

I froze, afraid that the two would hear it. But they went on talking as if they hadn't noticed. It was no wonder—the Allegory's voice thundered so.

"He met Love, Youth and Beauty—which are nowhere to be found in abundance except in this valley—in the form of Alice Lewis. And she, like all three of those qualities, was not won easily, nor without a change in the wooer. She rejected him, lured him, teased him, almost drove him crazy. She wanted him, yet she didn't. And he had to conquer some of his faults—such as shame of his baldness and toothlessness—before he could win her, only to find out his imagined faults were, in her eyes, virtues."

"Do you think he'll know the answer to the question you, in your metamorphs as Allegory and Polivinosel, asked him?" Peggy said.

"I don't know. I wish I'd first taken the form of the Sphinx and asked him her question, so he'd have had a clue to what was expected of him. He'd have known, of course, that the answer to the Sphinx is that man himself is the answer to all the old questions. Then he might have seen what I was driving at when I asked him where Man—Modern Man—was going."

"And when he finds the answer to that, then he too will be a god."

"IF!" said Allegory. *"If!* Mahrud says that Dan Temper is quite a few cuts above the average man of this valley. He is the reformer, the idealist who won't be happy unless he's tilting his lance against some windmill. In his case, he'll not only have to defeat the windmills within himself—his neuroses and traumas—he'll have to reach deep within

himself and pull up the drowned god in the abyss of himself by tbe hair. If be doesn't, he'll die."

"Oh, no, not that!" gasped Peggy. "I didn't know Mahrud *meant* it!"

"Yes," thundered the Allegory, "he does! He says that Temper will have to find himself or die. Temper himself would want it that way. He'd not be satisfied with being one of the happy-go-lucky, let-the-gods-do-it Brew-bums who loaf beneath this uninhibited sun. He'll either be first in this new Rome, or else be'll die."

The conversation was interesting, to say the least, but I lost track of the next few sentences because the bottle had not quit gushing. It was spurting a gentle but steady stream against my side. And, I suddenly realized, if it did not stop, the bag would fill, and the bottle's contents would run out the moutb of the bag and reveal my presence.

Frantically, I stuck my finger in the bottle's neck and succeeded in checking the flow.

"So," said Allegory, "be fled to the cemetery, where he met Weepenwilly, the eternal mourner who yet would resent the dead being brought back and who refuses to take his cold and numbed posterior from the gravestone of his so-called beloved. Tbat man was the living symbol of himself, Daniel Temper, who grieved himself into baldness at an early age, though he blamed his mysterious sickness and fever for it, yet wbo, deep down, didn't want his motber back, because she'd been nothing but trouble to him."

The pressure in the bottle suddenly increased and expelled my finger. The Brew in it burst over me despite my efforts to plug it up again, gushing out at such a rate that the bag would fill faster than its narrow mouth could let it out. I was facing two dangers —being discovered and being drowned.

As if my troubles weren't enough, somebody's heavy foot descended on me and went away. A voice succeeded it. I recognized it, even after all these years. It was that of Doctor Boswell Durbam, the god now known as Mahrud. But it bad a basso quality and ricbness it bad not possessed in his pre-deity days.

"All right, Dan Temper, the masquerade is over!"

FROZEN witb terror, I kept silent and motionless.

"I've sloughed off the form of Allegory and taken my own," Durham went on. "That was really I talking all the time. The original Albert left this valley a long time ago. I was the Allegory you refused to recognize. Myself —your old teacher. But then you

always did refuse to see any of the allegories I pointed out to you.

"How's this one, Danny? Listen. You crawled aboard Charon's ferry—this coal barge—and into the sack which contained your mother's bones. Not only that, but as a further unconscious symbol of your rejection of the promise of life for your mother, you threw her bones overboard. Didn't you notice her name on tbe tag? Why not? Subconsciously on purpose?

"Well, Dan my boy, you're right back where you started—in your mother's womb where, I suspect, you've always wanted to be. How do I know so much? Brace yourself for a real shock. I was Doctor Durf, the psychologist who conditioned you. Run that name backward and remember how I love a pun or an anagram."

I found all this hard to believe. In the first place, the Professor had always been kindly, gentle and humorous. He had abhorred the deep searching pretensions of the modern witch-doctors of the soul. He had never ceased poking fun at them, even in his Classical Litt classes. I would have thought he was pulling my leg if it hadn't been for one thing. That was the Brew, which was about to drown me. I really thought he was carrying his joke too far.

I told him so, as best I could in my muffled voice.

He yelled back, " 'Life is real—life is earnest!' You've always said so, Dan. Let's see now if you meant it. All right, you're a baby due to be born. Are you going to stay in this sac and die, or are you going to burst out from the primal waters into life?

"Let's put it another way, Dan. I'm the midwife, but my hands are tied. I can't assist in the accoucbement directly. I bave to coach you via long distance, symbolically, so to speak. I can tell you what to do to some extent, but you, being an unborn infant, may have to guess at the meaning of some of my words."

I wanted to cry out a demand that he quit clowning around and let me out. But I didn't. I had my pride.

Huskily, weakly, I said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Answer the questions I, as Allegory and Ass, asked you. Then you'll be able to free yourself. And rest assured, Dan, that I'm not opening the bag for you."

WHAT was it he had said? My mind groped frantically; the rising tide of the Brew made thinking difficult. I wanted to scream and tear at the leather with my naked hands. But if I did that, I'd go under and never come up again.

I clenched my fists, forced my mind to slow down, to go back over what Allegory and Polivinosel had said.

What was it? What was it?

The Allegory bad said, "Wbere do you want to go now?"

And Polivinosel, while chasing me down Adams Street—*Adam's* Street?—had called out, "Little man, what now?"

The answer to the Sphinx's question was:

Man.

Allegory and the Ass had proposed their questions in the true scientific manner so that they contained their own answer.

That answer was that man was *more* than man.

In the next second, with that realization acting like a powerful motor within me, I snapped the conditioned reflex as if it were a wishbone, and drank deeply of the Brew, both to quencb my thirst and to strip myself of the rest of my pre-deity inhibitions. I commanded the bottle to stop fountaining. And with an explosion that sent Brew and leather fragments flying over the barge, I rose from the bag.

Mahrud was standing there, smiling. I recognized him as my old prof, even though he was now six and a balf feet tall, bad a thatch of long black hair and bad pushed his features a little here and pulled them a little there to make himself handsome. Peggy stood beside bim. She looked like her sister, Alice, except that she was red-haired. She was beautiful, but I've always preferred brunettes—specifically Alice.

"Understand everything now?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "including the fact that mucb of this symbolism was thought up on the spur of the moment to make it sound impressive. Also, that it wouldn't have mattered if I *had* drowned, for you'd have brought me back to life."

"Yes, but you'd never have become a god. Nor would you have succeeded me."

"What do you mean?" I asked blankly.

"PEGGY and I deliberately led you and Alice toward this dénouement so we could have somebody to carry on our work here. We're a little bored with what we've done, but we realize that we can't just leave. So I've picked you as a good successor. You're conscientious, you're an idealist, and you've discovered your potentialities. You'll probably do better than I have at this suspension of 'natural' laws. You'll make a better world than I could. After all, Danny, my godling, I'm the Old Bull, you know, the one for having fun.

"Peggy and I want to go on a sort of Grand Tour to visit the former gods of Earth, who are scattered all over the Galaxy. They're all young gods, you know,

by comparison with the age of the Universe. You might say they've just got out of school—this Eartb—and are visiting the centers of real culture to acquire polish."

"What about me?"

"You're a god now, Danny. You make your own decisions. Meanwhile, Peggy and I have places to go."

He smiled one of those long slow smiles he used to give us students when he was about to quote a favorite line of his.

" '. . . listen: there's a hell
of a good universe next door.
Let's go.' "

Peggy and he did go. Like thistles, swept away on the howling winds of space, they were gone.

And after they had vanished, I was left staring at the river and the hills and the sky and the city, where the assembled faithful watched awestruck. It was mine, all mine.

Including one black-haired figure—and *what* a figure—that stood on the wharf and waved at me.

Do you think I stood poised in deep reverie and pondered on my duty to mankind or the shape of teleology now that I was personally turning it out on my metaphysical potter's wheel?

Not I. I leaped into the air and completed sixteen entrechats of pure joy before I landed. Then I walked across the water—*on* the water—to Alice.

THE next day, I sat upon the top of a hill overlooking the valley. As the giant troop-carrying gliders soared in, I seized them with psychokinesis, or what-have-you, and dunked them one by one in the river. And as the Marines threw away their arms and swam toward shore, I plucked away their oxygen masks and thereafter forgot about them, unless they seemed to be having trouble swimming. Then I was kind enough to pick them up and deposit them on shore.

I do think it was rather nice of me. After all, I wasn't in too good a mood. That whole night and morning, my legs and my upper gums had been very sore. They were making me somewhat irritable, despite liberal potions of Brew.

But there was a good reason.

I had growing pains and I was teething.

Philip José Farmer

Lover Boy

By THEODORE R. COGSWELL

Sheldon pulled a devilish clever deal . . . but isn't "pull" a synonym for "jerk"?

SHELDON'S thin aristocratic face reflected a mixture of defiance, despair and horror, as he stood in the center of the housekeeper's sitting room and looked down at the fat woman sprawled out on the worn divan.

"I'll do anything you say," he said. "Anything but that! I'll—I'll set up a trust fund so that you'll never have to worry about money again as long as you live. But I won't kill her. I love her. Can't you understand that? I *love* her!"

Mrs. Higgens looked up at him contemptuously. *"Love!"* she snorted. "That's a laugh. You knock off her old man so you can marry her and get your mitts on his money, and now you go soft and start talking about love. It's no soap, lover boy—you belong to me and nobody else. You're going to feed her enough champagne at the wedding supper so that she gets good and loaded, and then you're going to see that she accidentally falls off the bedroom balcony while she's out getting a breath of fresh air. That's the way

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

it's going to be. Period! You see?"
"I'll kill myself first!"

MRS. Higgens popped another chocolate in her mouth, sucked on it noisily, then drawled, "It's a nice idea, lover boy, but let's face it—you just ain't got the guts. And since you haven't, there's nothing you can do but what I tell you, when I tell you, the way I tell you. You're mine, little man—until I get tired of you or death doth us part."

Her eyes narrowed slightly, as if she knew the chain of thought her last words had triggered inside his head.

"And it better be *your* death that does the parting, lover boy, not mine. I know, with the kind of dough you're going to have after the wedding, it wouldn't be too hard for you to arrange an accident . . ." She let her voice trail off, then gave a nasty chuckle. "*If* it wasn't for that package of evidence I got tucked away where you'll never find it. Your story about old man Arnett busting his head falling downstairs wouldn't be worth spit if the police got their hands on my signed statement and a blood-stained poker with your fingerprints on it. Just don't forget that, and we'll get along fine."

She waved one pudgy hand in a gesture of dismissal. "You'd better go down and find your little Virginia. She'll be wondering what happened to you." She sighed and leaned back luxuriously. "But first give me a little kiss to tide me over till evening." Her voice sharpened. "*And kiss me as if you meant it!*"

Sheldon was seized with a momentary fit of obstinacy. "The nights are bad enough," he said. "At least you can leave me alone during the day."

"*Lover boy!*"

It was only a whisper, but it held a quality of command that caused him to stiffen convulsively, as if a flying stiletto had suddenly pierced him between the shoulder blades. With a wretched attempt at an affectionate smile, he walked woodenly over and knelt beside her.

"That's better, lover boy," she crooned as she drew him down to her. "This is the way it's going to be with us—for ever and ever."

AS Sheldon walked down the back stairs from the servants' quarters to where Virginia was waiting, he found himself fingering a business card in his jacket pocket. Every word of the prediction whispered by the small, dark man who had accosted him after the funeral was coming true. Every single word.

He pulled the card out for the tenth time and looked at it. On it were a neatly engraved name and address—*DeWitt Norman, Room* 427 *Temple Building*—but

as he stared reflectively at the oblong white cardboard, two words, written in a strange archaic script, suddenly appeared and then just as suddenly vanished.

DEATH INSURANCE

Mr. Norman looked quite human—except for his eyes. They glowed with a strange rubylike fire in the semi-darkness of his dimly lighted office.

"She's a monster," said Sheldon. "A demon—a succubus who's fastened onto me and won't let go. Her flabby body is bad enough, hut what's inside is worse. I look into her eyes and see crawling things leering out at me. I listen to that croaking voice whispering obscene suggestions in the night and . . ." His hands moved as if they were gripping a fat neck, then fell helplessly to his sides. "Sometimes I think she's possessed!"

Mr. Norman grinned. Sheldon noticed something odd about his teeth. They were more pointed than they had any right to be. "In her case, it hasn't been necessary," he said. "She's been doing such an effective job all by herself that she hasn't needed any inside help. That's not the immediate point, however. You obviously came to see me about something more concrete than a mere discussion of the villainous nature of the late Mr. Arnett's housekeeper. Right?"

"As a matter of fact, I did," said Sheldon slowly. "I've had a strange feeling that you might—er—help me." He seemed to he having trouble formulating his words.

"By removing this female?" asked Mr. Norman helpfully. "Why, of course. That's my *business*. You'd be surprised at the number of amateurs who come to me for help in tidying up jobs they've botched. And yours, if you don't mind my saying so, was a singularly clumsy affair. Permitting a servant to wander in, right in the middle of your operation, then letting her get away with a piece of such incriminating evidence as the murder weapon—*really!*"

"How was *I* to know she was watching?" Sheldon burst out. He stopped suddenly, his eyes widening. "How did *you* know about *that?*" he demanded hoarsely.

"The usual way. The home office supplies us with leads on prospective clients, and I got a routine notice on you the day after Mr. Arnett's unfortunate – accident. But as my *client*—" his voice seemed to italicize the word—"you may rely on my discretion, just as you would upon that of your doctor or lawyer. Ours is an extremely ethical profession, you know. It has to he. But back to business." He gave Sheldon a calculating

look. "You *do* want to go on with this, don't you?"

SHELDON gulped and nodded. "Good," said Mr. Norman. "If we can agree on the details now, I'll draw up a policy and send it directly to the home office for approval. It should be ready for your signature by tomorrow." He tapped the desk-top thoughtfully with long tapered fingers. "Ordinarily, I would recommend what is often incorrectly referred to as an *Act of God*—something like a bolt of lightning or a small twister—but in this case, the party you are concerned with has been clever enough to protect herself against such obvious measures. Her death would immediately insure yours, since that package of incriminating evidence would be forwarded to the police at once."

"Couldn't you just arrange to have the package destroyed?" Sheldon suggested.

Mr. Norman shook bis bead regretfully. "It wouldn't be ethical. The president of the bank that has custody of the package is also a client of mine. No, what is needed is a procedure that will keep Mrs. Higgens alive and, at the same time, helpless."

"And the price?" asked Sheldon uneasily.

"We can discuss that later. It's the problem that interests me. Let me think about it a moment."

A long silence followed.

"*Got* it!" said the small dark man suddenly.

"Remember, she's got to remain alive!"

"I know that—she will. But once I've decanted her, the fat creature you know as Mrs. Higgens could be written off as a threat."

"Once you've what?"

"Decanted her. I believe the vulgar refer to the process as soul-snatching. If the soul is removed skillfully from its container—"

"Container?"

"Body, if you prefer," said Mr. Norman patiently. "If properly decanted, the body will remain alive, but that's all. Your overweigbt courtesan will be an empty, mindless husk—but not dead. As long as she isn't, by your own admission, you have nothing to worry about."

"Sounds good," said Sheldon thoughtfully. "Excellent, in fact. But to get back to the matter of price . . ." He tried to look squarely into the dark man's eyes, but found he couldn't. There was a strange magnetic quality in the dull-red glowing orbs that gave him the feeling he was being sucked out of himself.

"Let's get back to the price," be said at last. "If the old tales are true, it may be more than I can afford to pay."

"The price is the usual one," said Mr. Norman. "But you must remember that most of the stories you've heard originated with a handful of malcontents. Anyway," he added quickly, "billing you for the premium is obviously only a technicality. You must be aware that your unauthorized and premeditated liquidation of your employer has already given the home office a permanent lien on your future services. Why not get something out of the deal?"

THE more Sheldon thought about it, the more he wavered. The dark man waited until the opportune moment and then, with the skill of an experienced salesman, added, "I might even be able to toss in something extra."

"Huh? Such as?" asked Sheldon cautiously.

"I haven't made my quota yet this month. Just to keep the home office off my neck, I might be willing to throw in an extra wish. The standard policy calls for only one to the insuring party, but if you'll agree to close the deal within the next forty-eight hours, I'll toss in another absolutely free. That way, you'll be able to take care of Mrs. Higgens with the first one and still have one left over for anything else your heart desires."

"Forty-eight hours doesn't give me much time to think it over," Sheldon complained unhappily.

"More than you need," answered Mr. Norman. "You're getting married tomorrow afternoon. Right? And I believe Mrs. Higgens has certain plans for the disposal of your bride shortly after the ceremony. Miss Arnett is a pleasant little morsel and it would be a shame to lose her."

Sheldon was in obvious agreement with the last statement. "That second wish," he said, "did you say I could have *anything* I wanted?"

"Well," said the dark man slowly, "*almost* anything. Let's say anything that isn't under direct control of our heavenly competitors. As long as your wish doesn't directly violate one of the divine ordinances, we can give it to you."

"One more thing—I'm naturally concerned about when payment will have to be made."

"At the usual time—on your death bed."

Sheldon hesitated and looked at Mr. Norman dubiously. "You seem to specialize in accidents. What's to keep you from arranging a fatal one for me in the near future?"

The dark man seemed shocked at the suggestion.

"You apparently have no idea of the ethics of my profession," he said coldly. "But if it will make you any happier, I'll give you my word that neither I nor any mem-

ber of my organization will do anything, directly or indirectly, to hasten your death."

"Can I have that in writing?" asked Sheldon cannily.

"Certainly." Mr. Norman still looked hurt. "I'll even insert a clause to the effect that the whole agreement becomes null and void in case of any breach of contract on our part. Now, does that satisfy you?"

"I'll have to think about it a bit more," said Sheldon, as he rose to go. He paused at the door. "In case I decide to—to take out a policy with your company, how can I get in touch with you?"

"Don't worry about that," said the dark man. "When you need me, I'll be there."

SHELDON tapped lightly on the dressing room door. "I have to step out for a moment, Virginia. I'll be right back," he said.

"Don't be long, darling," a soft voice whispered from the other side. "I'm almost ready."

He stepped into the hallway and shut the bedroom door securely behind him. Mr. Norman wasn't late. There was a slight shimmer in the air, and he stood before Sheldon.

"Did you bring the policy?"

The dark man nodded and snapped his fingers. A glowing piece of parchment materialized in the air in front of them.

"All complete, except for your formal agreement."

Now that the moment had arrived, Sheldon felt a sudden desire to temporize. If he had miscalculated, if just one little thing went wrong, he was lost. As he thought of the consequences, his courage began to drain from him.

"Perhaps we'd better wait until morning," he said in a hesitant voice.

"It wouldn't be wise," said Mr. Norman. "The fat one is sitting in her room, watching the clock. It's already half an hour past the appointed time for the accident. She is mad with jealousy and if, during the night, her passion should overcome her self-interest, she might give orders for that package to be sent to the police. Unless you act now, it may be too late."

The man was right. He couldn't put it off any longer. He took a deep breath and managed to force out two words.

"I agree."

As he spoke, his signature appeared in letters of fire on the bottom of the parchment that was hanging in front of him.

"Your first wish?"

"Mrs. Higgens. You know what to do. Be quick about it!"

The dark man gave a sardonic salaam and disappeared.

A few seconds later, he was

back again.

"The decanting is complete. The fat one is alive, but nothing looks out through her eyes."

Sheldon let out a shuddering sigh as the weight that had been oppressing him for so long seemed to slide off his shoulders. He stood in silence for a moment, savoring the champagne bouquet taste of freedom.

"And your second?" said the dark man. "Have you thought of what it will be?"

Sheldon nodded slowly.

"Good. You might as well make it now, so I can have the home office get to work on it. If you want to be world dictator or something like that, they'll need a little advance notice. Even with their tremendous resources, things like that take time, you know. What is it—power?"

"No, with the Arnett millions, I already have that," Sheldon said firmly.

"Wisdom, perhaps?"

"That can be bought, also. I want one thing that money can't buy."

"And that is?"

A blaze kindled in Sheldon's eyes that almost matched that in the dark man's.

"Immortality!"

HE waited, but felt no change take place within himself. "Now!" he cried impatiently. The dark man spread both hands forward, palms up in an apologetic gesture. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but that is one thing I can't grant now. You should have asked for it before the marriage ceremony."

Sheldon fought for control, as he felt himself being sucked into the quicksand of sudden panic and despair.

"But . . ." he barely whispered. "But you said . . ."

"I said the home office had control over all matters *except* those coming under celestial jurisdiction."

"What's all that got to do with denying me immortality?" There was a note of desperation in Sheldon's voice.

"Marriage is a divine sacrament," said the little man unctuously. "Surely, you remember the part of the service in which it is said, 'Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' "

"But you're not a man!" Sheldon objected.

"It's all a matter of definition," said Mr. Norman. "And unfortunately, in the case of McGinty vs Molach, it was decided that for actuarial purposes, the term *man* was to be construed to include all sentient beings except currently bonafide residents of the celestial regions. The home office fought the case all the way up to the

highest authority, but the original decision was sustained. It was the first time in the history of our organization that the underwriters were unable to collect the premium due on an issued policy."

"I still don't get it," said Sheldon.

"You should—it's really quite simple. To grant you immortality and leave your wife mortal would be the surest way of tearing your marriage apart. For a few years, things would be fine, but what about afterward? When the years begin to erode Virginia's beauty, what then? How long would she be able to stand the contrast between your youth and her age? And how long would you?"

"That would be our affair, not yours."

"I'm afraid the authorities would take a different view. They would be sure to hold that my original action was the primary cause of the eventual sundering. Sorry, Sheldon, but you'll have to think of something else."

He gave a lecherous wink. "How would you like to be Casanova's successor?"

"Not interested. The only woman I want is waiting for me in there." He gestured toward the bedroom.

"Then, how about—"

"No!" interrupted Sheldon savagely. "I don't want anything else. Give me a chance to think, will you!"

He rubbed his knuckles against his temples, as if somehow the action would speed up thought. Immortality was the only thing that would save him, but—'let no man put asunder.' However, if *she* were immortal also . . . *of course!*

THERE was no spectacular show, only a rippling sense of vitality that tingled momentarily through every nerve cell in his body.

"It's done?"

The dark man plucked the parchment out of the air and put it away carefully in his inside coat pocket.

"It's done. Neither of you can ever know physical death. A clever solution to your dilemma, Mr. Sheldon, an extremely clever solution. May I congratulate you on it?"

Sheldon made no effort to conceal the exultation that was blazing inside him. "You may, but on something shrewder than that. I've tricked you—you and your whole damned organization. Hasn't it occurred to you that, according to the terms of my policy, the premium doesn't fall due until my death? And I'm immortal—*immortal!*"

There was a singing wonder to the last word that made him repeat it again and again, as if he

didn't quite believe it.

Mr. Norman didn't say anything, but an odd little smile flickered across his face as he bowed politely and vanished.

Sheldon felt some apprehension which he quickly dismissed. *She* was gone—gone forever—and he had his new bride and his new fortune to pleasure him through all eternity.

Slowly, almost timidly, he opened the bedroom door and quietly slipped inside.

Virginia was so beautiful that his breath caught in his throat and his heart began pounding so wildly that it seemed to him the sound must be echoing through the room like drumbeats. As he knelt beside his bride, her lovely heart-shaped face turned up to his and a little pointed tongue licked full red lips.

"My darling!" he whispered. "Tell me it's always going to be like this."

Two deep sapphire blue eyes opened and Mrs. Higgens looked out through them at her lover. Slowly, she voluptuously ran her hands over the full rich curves of her new container.

" 'Till death doth us part,' " she crooned. "Kiss me, lover boy. Kiss me as if you meant it."

Theodore R. Cogswell

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If you value your love-life,

have no traffic with . . .

The green-eyed corner

By JAY CLARKE

THE corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in New York certainly isn't the sort of corner one should find oneself thinking of at absurd hours of the night. As corners go, I suppose it is quite satisfactory, being composed of mathematically exact 90-degree angles and quite busy, as corners should be. But to find oneself dwelling on it at wholly incongruous times is a damned nuisance. Corners should be content to be corners and not intrude where they don't belong.

Lately, I have tried to reason with myself that 42-dash-5—as I have begun to call it—is really minding its own business and that I am blaming it unfairly. But Chelsie won't accept this. She says I am perfectly sane and would not go around thinking of corners, particularly mathematically exact and

Illustrated by EMSH

busy corners, of my own volition. This may have been true a year ago—but since then a lot has bappened.

It began when Chelsie pboned me at my office to say that sbe had just moved to New York and thought she'd call me to say hello. I hadn't seen Chelsie since high school days in Florida, but I remembered ber as a slightly scrawny though promising young girl with a good bead on her shoulders.

So I took her cue and suggested she meet me at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, whicb any out-of-towner finds easy to locate.

CHELSIE more than filled my expectations. She was scrawny no longer and had all tbe freshness of the spray of a waterfall. We shook hands warmly and sbe seemed as glad to see me as I was to see her. We cbatted for a few minutes at the corner, then strolled off with her bolding my arm. Even then I was quite sure I was falling in love.

Well, Chelsie and I got along wonderfully and soon I was meeting her at 42-dash-5 every evening after work and it was quite obvious to anyone who even casually glanced at us that we were in love with eacb other. There never bad been any real doubt of it since the day we first met at 42-dasb-5.

It was about this time tbat I began to notice something strange about 42-dash-5. Every time I came up to the corner to meet Chelsie, the roar of traffic seemed to become more subdued, like a purr. The automobile borns seemed to lose their harshness and become muted, sounding a delicate obbligato to the throbbing exhausts of the cars. Once I could have sworn tbat a traffic light winked at me solicitously.

Naturally, I was inclined to pass this off as a quirk of my imagination or perhaps as a consequence of my being in love—for who had ever beard of a corner winking solicitously at a buman being? But it persisted and one day, without thinking, I began to cross the street against the light.

Immediately, a protest of horns blasted out at me, the traffic noise rose to terrifying levels and brakes squealed with ill-concealed temper. Then, to my amazement, the traffic ligbts blinked once or twice and switched to red to stop the vehicles pounding toward me.

I hurried across the street and as soon as I reached the sidewalk, the lights cbanged back to green. I stared in disbelief. The traffic clucked at me reprovingly.

Then I became aware of its purr again, warmer and motherly. *It likes me,* I thought wonderingly. *The corner likes me. It saved me from being killed.*

Chelsie came up just then and I

told her what had happened.

She laughed. "Imagine!" she said. "A corner with a mother complex! Really, Harold, you shouldn't talk like that. People will think you belong in a psychiatric ward."

"Well, it *did* happen," I replied surlily. "The lights turned red when I was about to get run down, and then turned back to green as soon as I was safely across the street. The corner likes me."

Chelsie laugbed again. "Oh, come on, Harold. Corners have no feelings."

AN angry roar rose from the traffic behind us. I glanced around apprehensively, then whispered to Chelsie, "See? It didn't like what you said. It's angry. Did you hear it?"

Chelsie looked at me appraisingly. "I think you believe it," she said slowly. "I really do."

I started to reply that of course I did, but then I studied the matter objectively. Obviously, corners do *not* bave feelings.

I grinned. "Don't be silly," I replied, taking her hand firmly in mine. "The only thing I'm crazy about is you."

That seemed to satisfy her and the incident was closed.

The next few days, nothing further happened and neither of us brought up the subject. Then, about a week later, when I walked up to 42-dash-5, Chelsie waved me back and started across the street to meet me. She had gotten about halfway across when the lights turned green witbout warning and the waiting cars leaped ahead, racing down at her with their motors roaring angrily.

I cried out and jumped into the snarling cataract of automobiles, heedless of the risk. I reached her side just before a low-slung cab bore down on her. Miraculously, the cab made an almost impossible swerve, its tires screeching in protest, and I quickly led Chelsie to the sidewalk. Behind us, the traffic growled in an ugly voice.

"Oh, Harold!" she cried, collapsing into my arms. "I was so scared!"

"Cbelsie, Cbelsie," I murmured, holding her tight. "Don't ever do that again. It doesn't like you. It tried to kill you."

She looked up at me then, the tears drying on her face. "What," she asked suspiciously, "doesn't like me?"

"The corner doesn't," I answered. "*I* didn't save you. *It* did. It bad to to prevent my being killed, too. It likes *me*."

She gazed at me for a moment, then buried her head in my shoulder and began to cry again—but this time it was a different kind of crying. She was unhappy, not scared.

"Harold," she sobbed. "I know

a good doctor here. A specialist in this sort of thing. I think you ought to . . ." She raised her head and looked up at me. "Oh, I don't care if you *are* crazy. I love you!"

"LOOK," I told her later. "I know corners are inanimate and can't like or dislike people. But you saw yourself that the lights turned green at the wrong time. I know, because I was watching them. Besides, when I jumped into the street to get you, none of the cars hit me, even though they had enough chance. And you saw how the cab swerved to avoid running over me. *This* corner is different. It likes me and it doesn't like you."

"Darling," Chelsie protested, "the wiring's probably mixed up in the traffic lights. The little thing that makes the lights turn red and green probably isn't working right. That's all."

"But the cars—and the cab! What about the cab?"

"Oh, you know how crazy New York drivers are," she replied.

"Well, maybe so," I conceded. "But let's not meet there any more."

"No, darling," Chelsie said firmly. "We're going to meet at 42nd and Fifth. You've got to get this crazy idea out of your mind."

"But, Chelsie, you might—"

"No buts about it. If you love me, you'll meet me there."

I gave up. How can a man argue against logic like that?

Things were quiet again for a couple days and I began to think that perhaps Chelsie was right, that it was all a figment of my imagination. But on the third day after Chelsie's narrow escape, 42-dash-5 acted up again.

This time I had gotten there ahead of Chelsie and was waiting at the Library side for her when I saw her walk up to the opposite curb. Almost imperceptibly, the traffic noise crept up a little as she waited for the light to change so that she could cross over. I chewed my fingernails nervously.

Then it happened. Without warning, a huge double-decker bus suddenly swerved toward the sidewalk, mounted the curb and hurled itself at Chelsie.

"Look out!" I yelled, starting across the street.

But it was obvious I could never get there in time. Just then, Chelsie screamed and stumbled back, luckily falling behind the traffic light post. The bus skidded to a halt an inch from the post.

WHEN I reached her, Chelsie was white as a sheet.

Ignoring the curious crowd that had collected, I lifted her to her feet and we made our way through the bystanders.

"Harold," she said in a low, choked voice, "I *saw* it. It tried to kill me."


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"You saw *it?*"

"The street. It rose up and made the bus swerve toward me. I saw it." She shuddered.

"I know a good doctor here," I mimicked. "A specialist in this sort of thing. I think you ought to—"

"Oh, Harold, *don't!*" she whispered miserably. "What are we going to do?"

I thought about that for a moment. Suddenly a ridiculously obvious solution occurred to me. If 42-dash-5 insisted on being more than a corner, then I would have to treat it as such.

"Wait here," I said.

She looked at me in alarm. "Where are you going?"

I smiled and kissed her lightly on the lips. "To put something in its place," I replied.

Quickly, I retraced my steps and 42-dash-5 purred softly as I approached. I crossed to the Lihrary side of the street.

"See here," I said firmly, addressing my remarks to the asphalt below me. "This sort of thing has got to stop. I'm in love with that girl."

The auto horns jeered derisively.

"I mean it," I said. "I love her and I'm going to marry her."

The traffic noises rumhled indecisively, then rose angrily.

"And if you hurt her, you'll hurt me and I'll never come here again!" I called ahove the steadily increasing roar.

The horns were scolding now and the red lights blinked once or twice.

"You've got no right to try to interfere with my life!" I yelled back at 42-dash-5. "I'm old enough to do what I want to do, you nagging old goat!"

The traffic light on the opposite side of the street suddenly turned red and hlew out. The cacophony of horns grew deafening.

"Yes, that's what you are," I repeated, "a nagging old goat!"

At this, all the lights turned red and blew out, spewing glass over the street. Cars and buses leaped forward, crashing together in the middle of the intersection. Frightened pedestrians jumped to the relative safety of the sidewalk. Horns hlared, motors raced and from a vent hissed huge columns of steam high in the air. Old 42-dash-5 was an awful mess.

I WAITED patiently until the activity died down somewhat.

"Now look here," I scolded. "All this time you've been prejudiced against Chelsie just hecause of one little remark. Did you ever stop to think that she really likes you?"

A manhole cover rattled questioningly.

"Yes!" I said. "She's told me many times that this is the most wonderful corner in the world. That's where we met in New York,

you know. Why, she even insisted we meet here even after you almost killed her!"

A horn honked contritely.

"And in the meantime, you've been hounding her unmercifully! Shame on you!"

A green light flickered plaintively.

"As a matter of fact," I continued heartlessly, "I was going to ask your blessing to marry her, but now I'm going to have nothing to do with you. You hear? Nothing!"

The manhole cover rattled pleadingly. The steam vent cried brokenly. A horn wailed.

I relented. "All right, all right. We'll come here every now and then—but only if you promise to be good. Do you promise?"

The green lights went on again.

"Cross your transformers and hope to short out?"

The steam vent blew a huge smoke ring into the air.

"Okay," I declared. "No more of this nonsense, then."

Coolly staring down the curious and somewhat frightened looks of the inevitable crowd that had gathered around me, I returned to Chelsie.

"It's all right now," I told her.

"But what did you do?" she asked wonderingly.

"Why, I figured that if the corner insisted on being motherly and trying to protect me from you, I'd have to lay down the law. Every mother, you know, feels that her son's prospective bride is nothing but a scheming witch taking advantage of her little darling. They're jealous and a little hurt. So I bawled out 42-dash-5 and shamed it for acting the way it did. As soon as I had made perfectly clear that what it thought or did wasn't going to change my mind about you, it backed down. Simple psychology."

"Oh, Harold," Chelsie breathed. "You're wonderful!"

THAT was three months ago. Chelsie and I were married soon after and are very happy. Occasionally, we visit 42-dash-5 and it purrs contentedly. But as I say, I've been finding myself thinking of 42-dash-5 at odd hours of the night and I can't understand why I should, because all my trouble with it is cleared up.

Chelsie thinks it's the mother complex in 42-dash-5 that's trying to nag me at night, when I'm relaxed and receptive. But I don't know. Chelsie's liable to be prejudiced. After all, it's a little hard for a girl to realize she has a corner, particularly a mathematically exact and busy corner, for a mother-in-law.

Henry Martindale Great Dane

By MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

He didn't have to hunt down the dreaded old formula—it came looking for him!

Illustrated by KOSSIN

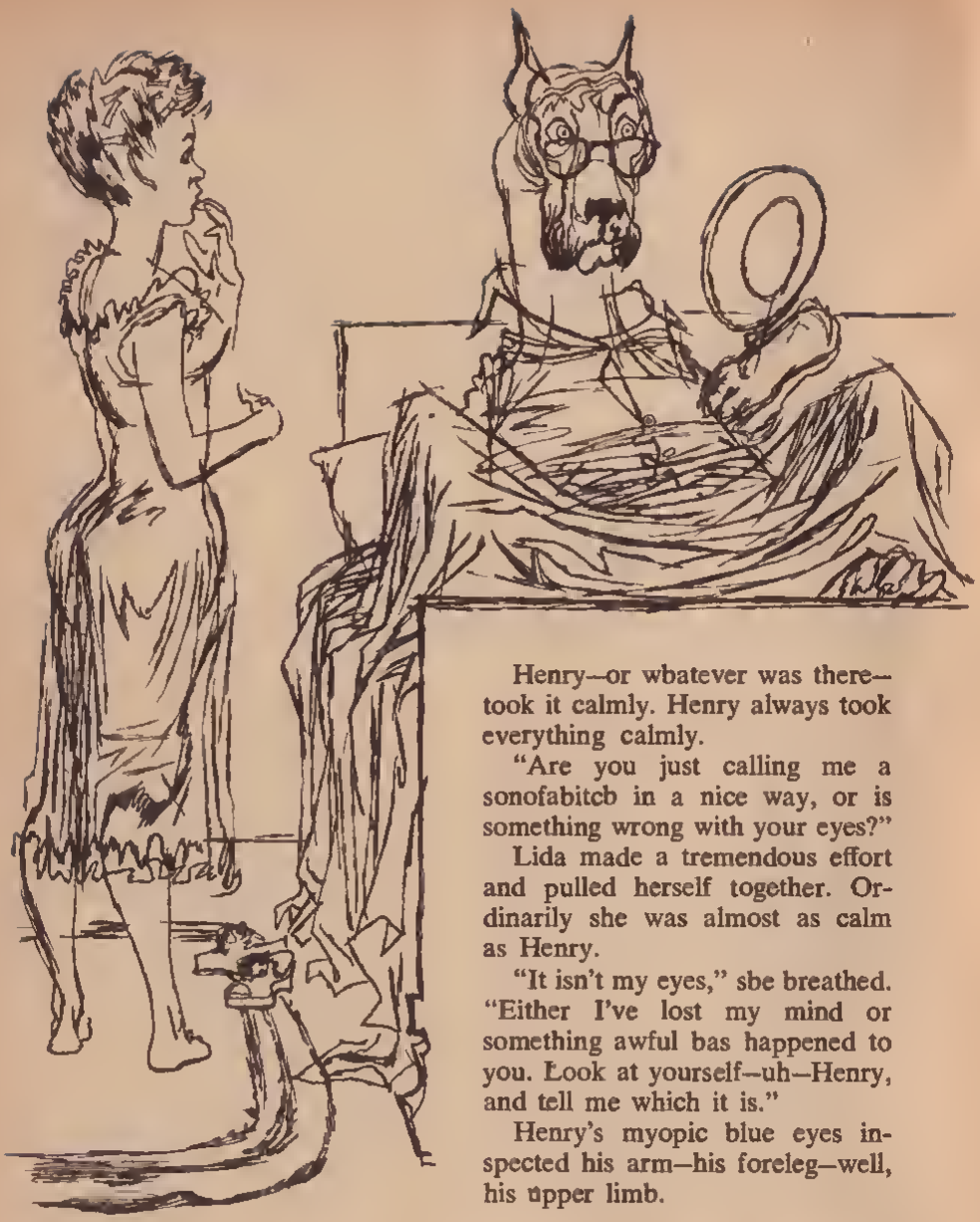
WHAT woke Lida was being hit on the nose with a pajama button. She opened her eyes abruptly. It was just barely light. She turned sleepily, took one look at the other side of the double bed and let out a screech. The thing lying there opened its eyes—Henry's eyes—and said—in Henry's voice—"What's the matter, honey?"

It wasn't Henry, though. It was a Great Dane in Henry's pajamas, with the top buttons popped off by its barrel chest.

Lida shot out of bed. She got as far as the door before it occurred to her that she might be the one who had gone crazy. Trembling, she inched back and took another look.

It was a Great Dane, all right.

"I—I—you look like a dog!" she managed to gasp.



Henry—or whatever was there—took it calmly. Henry always took everything calmly.

"Are you just calling me a sonofabitch in a nice way, or is something wrong with your eyes?"

Lida made a tremendous effort and pulled herself together. Ordinarily she was almost as calm as Henry.

"It isn't my eyes," she breathed. "Either I've lost my mind or something awful has happened to you. Look at yourself—uh—Henry, and tell me which it is."

Henry's myopic blue eyes inspected his arm—his foreleg—well, his upper limb.

"Can't see a thing without my glasses. Give them to me, honey. Something does feel funny. Bring me your hand-mirror, too."

THE glasses wouldn't go on Henry's new hroad nose. Lida held them with one shaking hand and passed over the mirror with the other. There was a long silence.

"You're not crazy, Lida," Henry said at last. "Something's happened."

Lida was speechless. Even Henry was shaken. He didn't drop the mirror, hut he laid it down with a distinct thump. Perhaps that was hecause he had been holding it in the crook of his—limh. He no longer had an opposahle thumh with which to grasp it. Unquestionahly, what he now had was a large dog's paw.

"Shades of Kafka!" he said in an awed tone. "Thank God I didn't turn into a giant cockroach!"

"B-hut what—"

"How do I know? Things do happen. I've heen trying for years to get you to take Charles Fort seriously. He has records of stranger things than this."

Lida hurst into tears.

"Now don't cry, honey." He put out a comforting paw, hut she shrank from it involuntarily. Fortunately for his feelings, Henry didn't see that. His glasses had fallen off as soon as she let go of them.

"We'll have to figure things out and use our common sense," he said in the reasonahle tone she had heen listening to for eight years.

"C-common sense! What has common sense to do with this unhelievahle, horrihle—"

"Hysteria won't help. Horrihle maybe, hut not unbelievahle hecause it has happened—and when a thing is real, we have to helieve it."

He climbed lahoriously out from under the hedclothes, hesitated a moment, his hind paws hovering over his slippers, then stood solidly on all fours. The pajama pants fell down. Solemnly he peered at himself in Lida's full-length pier glass.

"I can't get a good look this way. Find some adhesive tape and fasten my glasses on for me, will you, Lida? And take this pajama top off me. It's—it's inappropriate."

In a waking nightmare, Lida did as she was told. Henry took a long look.

"A Great Dane!" he murmured. "I wonder why. I never cared for them particularly. They cost too much to feed. Well, let's get down to cases."

He glanced helplessly at the pad and pencil which always stood on the night tahle on his side of the

bed. Until this morning, Henry Martindale had been a reasonably prosperous radio and television script writer.

"I can't think without notes, Lida," he sighed. "Write down what I tell you and I'll try to reason this thing out. But put on your dressing-gown first, dear, or you'll freeze."

This evidence of husbandly concern transformed Lida's horror into passionate loyalty and love. Somewhere within this canine shape, her own Henry lived intact. Suppose it had happened to her instead? Suppose she had awakened to find herself a Pekinese or a Siamese cat or a parakeet? Could she doubt that Henry would have stood hy her?

She reached for her dressing-gown, wrapped herself in it and took up the pad and pencil.

AT his dictation, she hegan to write the first considered reflections of Henry Martindale, Great Dane.

"One," he began, "this is either temporary or permanent. If it is temporary, I may wake up as myself tomorrow morning. In any event, I can manage to wait for a week—with your cooperation, Lida—" She nodded and even contrived to smile. "For a week, without arousing suspicion. Call up everyhody we had engagements with and tell them I have the flu. Tell Mrs. Whoozis the same thing when she comes to clean and keep her out of this room. I have a deadline on that story for Channel Twenty, hut I can dictate it as usual and you can deliver it. You'd better do all the phoning, too. I could talk, but I doubt if I could hold the phone."

Lida hid her shudder. Henry went on dictating.

"Two—if this condition is permanent, if it isn't gone in a week or so, then it may mean that I must face my remaining life-span as a Great Dane. Question—have I now the life-expectancy of a human being or of a dog?

"I must then make a major decision: where and how can I live? I have earned my living for fifteen years now as a writer. I could continue to dictate my stories, of course, but it would be utterly impossihle to conceal my—my present appearance. It would he still more impossihle to explain it, even to such hardened sophisticates as the script editors and agency men for whom I write. As for the family—my hrother and Aunt Agatha and your mother, Lida, and the rest of your relatives—I could, perhaps, hrazen it out and make advantageous connections with a television program."

"I won't have that!" Lida hurst out hotly. "I won't have you displaying yourself as a—as a freak!"

"An intelligent talking dog might be worth big money to the right sponsor," Henry said reasonably.

"No. They'd investigate first and—you couldn't get away with it anyway, Henry. Your eyes—they're still yours and people would wonder. And your voice—you've talked too often in public and on the air. Winchell would be sure to scent something and then all the other columnists would take it up."

"Perhaps you're right—it might be too risky—even though it would have been rather fun. Well, then, if I'm stuck for an indefinite period with this—this phenomenon, there will be only one thing I can do. We must go somewhere where we know nobody, where you can be a widow who lives alone with only her dog for company." He paused. "Wait a moment, Lida. No, don't write this down. Maybe I'm assuming too much. I'm taking it for granted that you'll be with me. No, let me finish. If you feel you can't stand it—if you want to go away, I'll understand—I'd never blame you. And, Lida, I beg of you, don't stick by me out of a sense of duty, just because a dog without an owner—even a dog that can think and talk—is a lost dog. Just because . . ."

He had to stop. His throat had tightened too much for him to go on.

LIDA'S last vestige of horror left her. "Don't be a fool, darling," she said brusquely. "I married you, not your looks. *You're* still here. If we have to go to the ends of the earth—if I have to pretend forever that you're my pet Great Dane . . ." She gulped down a sob. "Just so we're together . . ."

"Bless you, dearest," Henry said quietly. He had recovered his usual calm. "Go on taking this down now. We won't have to go to the ends of the earth. We can find some secluded place in the country, perhaps not more than a hundred miles from here. We'll have to think of ways to fend off our families and friends. But I can dictate my stories to you and we can handle all my business contacts by mail. There will be difficulties, of course. How can I sign letters or endorse checks, for instance?"

"I can forge your signature. I've done it before on letters, when you were deep in a story and didn't want to be disturbed."

"Yes, that would work. And we'll find means to solve the other problems as they come up. All we need face now is a week of waiting to see if this—transformation is permanent."

A thought occurred to Lida. "About food, Henry," she suggested nervously. "Do you want to eat as usual or—or should I buy some Canine Delight?"

"Hm—that's a point." Henry let his mind dwell on ham and eggs, then on Canine Delight. "I'm sorry, dear," he said apologetically, "but I'm afraid you'd better lay in a supply of dog food."

"It's eight o'clock. The grocery at the corner will be open. I'll dress and go out to get some—some breakfast for you. And here—I'll fasten your glasses on firmly so you can read the paper while I'm gone."

Already, she discovered gratefully, she was becoming accustomed to the new Henry. Her hands were steady as she adjusted the tape. She restrained an impulse to stroke the tawny head.

Henry watched her leave, his large myopic blue eyes moist. He had not mentioned the fear that gnawed at him, a fear worse than the bite of hunger. Suppose this were an intermediate stage—suppose he should gradually become more dog and less man, lose his power of speech, his power of human thought?

Time enough to face that if it began to happen. Time, probably, to run away alone into the unknown before she could stop him. Fortunately, all they possessed was in their joint names and ultimately Lida would have to let him be declared dead and cash in on his sizable insurance.

He gazed unseeingly at the paper most of the time while she was gone. Nothing in it was as strange as what had happened to Henry Martindale.

THE week went by somehow. Every night Henry went to sleep a Great Dane—he admitted he was more comfortable sleeping on a rug beside the bed—and every morning he woke up a Great Dane again. He ate Canine Delight and one night when Lida broiled two chops for herself, he enjoyed the juicy bones. But he felt no impulse to wag his tail or to bark. Inside, he was still completely Henry.

They devised a strap to hold his spectacles on, to avoid the pulling of hair that accompanied removing the adhesive tape. Physically, he was comfortable, though he began to long for exercise and fresh air. He could stand anything for a week—even Aunt Agatha's insistence that she must come to help nurse the poor boy, plus her resentment of Lida's firm refusal. Once there was a scare when the woman who came twice a week to clean insisted that she could vacuum the bedroom without bothering the invalid—but Lida won that round.

At the end of the week, it became obvious that the metamorphosis was either permanent or would be of indefinite duration. Henry had met his deadline and dictated the beginning of another

story in his television series, hut he felt distracted and uninterested.

"I guess this is it, Lida," he conceded on the eighth day. "We have to plan."

They pored over maps and made a list of upstate villages to be inspected.

"I can make the trips and come hack and report to you," said Lida duhiously. "But I hate to leave you here all alone day after day. You could let the phone ring, hut suppose Aunt Agatha came or Bill Goodlett or the Harrisons? Or a telegram or a special delivery letter?"

"I'll go with you," Henry decided promptly. "Call up all the likely people and tell them I'm better, hut you're taking me to the country to recuperate. We'll write everybody later, when we've found a place, that we're going to stay for a while. But first you'd hetter huy me a dog-collar and a leash, and then take me downtown and get a license for me."

"Oh, *darling*!"

"I know—it's grim. But we must he practical. I'll have to have a name, too. What do you want to call your Great Dane? Anything hut Hamlet will suit me."

"Why can't you still be Henry?" asked Lida faintly.

"Well, I guess it wouldn't matter—where we're going, wherever that is, they wouldn't get the point. All right, register me as Henry. I'll sit in the hack of the car, as a dog should. Thank goodness you can drive, honey. I'd hate to travel in a haggage car!"

So Lida, her huge dog in the hack seat, hegan visiting rural real estate offices to inquire about secluded cottages for rent. There was no sense in tying up their capital hy huying a house, when at any moment—as they still assured each other—this calamity might end and Henry be himself again.

ALL they got was turndowns. There was nothing, simply nothing, to he had. Villagers, they learned, don't rent their homes.

They had reached a state of dull despair when, almost the last on their hopeful list, they drove to Farmington.

Yes, said Mr. Bullis, there *was* one place—the old Gassingham house. It was in kinda had shape, needed some work done and it was three miles from the highway. But Liz Gassingham—she was all that was left—she lived in town now and she refused to sell. She'd never said she'd rent, hut she might.

Lida almost said she would take it sight unseen, hut stopped herself in time.

"There's only one thing, Mrs. Martindale. That dog of yours . . ." He cast an unfriendly eye on Henry, lying peaceahly on the floor of the real estate office.

"You mean Miss Gassingham wouldn't let me keep a pet?"

"Pet, yes—but pets to Liz is cats. She mightn't like the idea of a tenant with a dog—a monster dog like that, especially."

"But, Mr. Bullis, I told you—I'm all alone since my husband—went . . ." Lida's voice shook. "The doctor said I must go to the country to get back my strength. But I'd be afraid to live so far from people without Henry to protect me."

"That his name, Henry?"

Henry laid a warning paw on her foot. They had agreed that they must keep their own name because of the mail and she was remembering that most of the letters would be addressed to Henry.

"It's silly—perhaps you'll think it's crazy—but that was my husband's name. I—it makes me feel less lonely to call the dog Henry, too. He—went so suddenly."

"Um." Mr. Bullis sounded disapproving. "Well, let's go see Liz. Put the mutt in your car. You might talk her over, but not if she saw him first. Funny-looking dog at that, if you don't mind my saying so—awful funny-looking eyes. Will he make a row if you leave him?"

"Oh, no, Henry never—Great Danes don't bark much."

"Better lock him in. If the kids spot him, they'll be all over him and you don't want him jumping out."

Henry settled down philosophically in the car and took a nap.

Lida came back triumphant.

"I told her you were a settled old dog, Henry, too lazy to do any damage," she announced. "And that you were clean and never had fleas and just loved cats."

"Good gosh!" said Mr. Bullis, staring. "You talk to that mutt just like he was human!"

Lida tried to smile it off. "That's what being alone does to people, Mr. Bullis."

The house was pretty dreadful. It was big and watertight, but that was about all that could be said for it. Their modern furniture would look weird in it. The only lighting was by kerosene lamps. The water came from an outdoor pump—Henry wondered dismally if he could learn to pump with his mouth. The sanitary arrangements consisted of a Chick Sale in the back yard, and the cooking had to be done on a wood stove, with a fireplace for central heating.

But they had to have it and they could get along somehow. At least, Mr. Bullis said, Lida could hire Ed Monahan to chop wood and do the heaviest chores and there was old Mrs. Sharp—she sometimes took in washing for the summer people and she might be willing to do Mrs. Martindale's household laundry. He looked disparagingly at Lida's city-bred slenderness.

A MONTH later, all tbe lies had been told, all the arrangements had been made and Lida and Henry were residents of Farmington.

It was pretty rugged. Henry had to be careful—and make sure his spectacles were off—whenever anyone came to the house. But they managed. His mind had never been working hetter and be dictated scripts like mad, till he had a good backlog in several agency inventories. Smith, of D. D. B. & I., wrote him that if rusticating for their health would add the same touch of originality and conviction to other writers' stuff, he'd recommend it to all bis regulars. Henry twitched his ears irascihly when he read tbat one.

In a way, it was Lida who unwittingly brought on the inevitable crisis.

It was an evening in early Novemher. She was sitting hy the fireplace, knitting a sweater for Henry, who was lying contentedly at her feet. Henry bad become almost reconciled to being a dog. It was nice not having to wear clothes, for instance, tbough when the really cold weather came, he would prohahly want the sweater. He wished he could help Lida more with the housework, but there aren't many household tasks that can be done without hands.

Suddenly Lida said, "Henry, I've been thinking."

"So I've noticed. What about?" he countered.

"I've been thinking about—it."

"It" was what they had tacitly agreed to call Henry's transmogrification.

"What's the use of thinking about it?"

"That's just wbat I mean. You're just taking it lying down."

Henry rose to his feet and looked at her apologetically.

"Don't be silly," she said impatiently. "I don't mean that way. I mean you've – you've just accepted it. You haven't tried to—oh, to think how or why it happened or whether there's any way to undo it."

"Did the swan that was found in Central Park try to figure out how it could hecome Dorothy Arnold again?" Henry inquired sententiously.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Fort—I'm a Fortean phenomenon. He never said anything ahout the possihility of reversal."

"That doesn't mean it couldn't happen."

"Perhaps not. My guess is it would have to he spontaneous. But if it will make you any happier, Lida, I'll try anything you suggest."

"Henry, don't you *want* to be human again?"

"Because *you're* human, yes. But selfishly, I confess, so long

as I have the mind and the power of speech of a buman being . . ."

"That's one of the things I've been wondering about. A dog's throat and mouth aren't formed for human speecb, yet you can talk clearly with your own voice."

"I know. I've been puzzled about tbat, too. And my sight—dogs baven't very good sight, anyway, so that might fit. But they're supposed to be color-blind and I'm not any more than I ever was. I know very well that sweater you're knitting is beige and maroon."

"What about your other senses?"

"Well, I always had keen hearing and I still bave. But I certainly don't have the sense of smell of a dog—of other dogs, I mean."

"Don't say that!"

"I'm sorry. I get sort of confused sometimes. And there are other—disadvantages, of course. But, Lida, there's no use in going into all that. I don't know bow to change it."

"Tell me, can you remember anything special about that night—the nigbt before it happened?"

"I've tried. I remember I was working late on a script. It was nearly two when I went to bed and you were sound asleep. The last thing I recall was thinking, 'I'm dog-tired.' And then you woke me and it was morning and I was—like this."

"Dog-tired. Do you think . . ."

"Nonsense – pure coincidence. Or maybe . . ."

HENRY felt sudden excitement thrill through bim from bead to tail. All his calm acceptance dropped from him as his pajamas once had done.

"Lida, I've just remembered! The story I was working on that night was the one about a werewolf who evolved from a primitive wolflike creature instead of from apes, like us."

Lida stared at bim. "You mean . . ."

"Could be. Perbaps that story wasn't just imaginary—perhaps I bappened on actual facts and got transformed as a warning, maybe, or maybe that's how people turn into werewolves."

"Then there might be a way for you to change back again!"

"I don't see how. I didn't engineer it and I wouldn't know bow to engineer the reversal. I'd bave to get in touch somehow with a real werewolf. Hey, here's an idea! Let's get to work on another story about werewolves. It might be like—like tuning them in, if they really exist. And perhaps my transformer would get on my beam again. He might be glad to straighten me out."

"But suppose he isn't. *You're* not altogether sorry about being a dog—you just told me so. Suppose he decides you *like* being a pet,

with no responsibilities."

"That's not fair, honey." Henry's tone was aggrieved. "Don't I work just as hard as I ever did?"

"Oh, darling, I didn't mean you—just him!"

"In that case, he won't want to change me back and everything will stay the way it is now. What else could he do to me?"

Henry began dictating the new werewolf script the next morning. It went fast and smoothly, as if something in him knew beforehand what to say.

Yet neither of them felt comfortable. He said nothing to Lida, but under the flow of words he was conscious of an inner struggle, as though something or somebody were trying vainly to impede them. And she, though the original incitement had been her own, grew increasingly nervous and apprehensive.

At the end of three hours, the script was half done and both of them were exhausted.

"Let's knock off for the rest of the day," Henry suggested. "We can go on with it tomorrow. We both need exercise. I'd like to explore those thick woods—the ones we've never gone into."

NOTHING could have been more trim, tame and civilized than Farmington. Yet not five miles from the village, in the back country, lay the last remnants of what was once virgin forest. Its trees were of no value as timber and it had a bad reputation. There were said to be wildcats there, even bears. Parts of it belonged to landowners who never bothered with it, parts were still in the public domain. Local stories made it the hideout of robbers in the past and children were disciplined by threats of taking them there and leaving them.

Lida took Henry's spectacles off him and put on his collar and leash. Passing through the village in the car, they encountered Liz Gassingham, who scarcely returned Lida's greeting and snorted at sight of Henry.

"Great, horrible thing!" she muttered, glaring. "If she ever lets it loose to hurt my kitties, I'll throw her out, lease or no lease!"

They parked the car at the end of the road and walked half a mile over fields to the edge of the wood. Once inside, Lida shrank back a little.

"Henry," she said, "do you think there really are wild animals here? Let's not go too far."

Henry couldn't smile any more, but he laid a protecting paw on her hand. "The Great Dane," he said soothingly, "was originally a boarhound. I can handle anything we're likely to meet. And we won't get lost—don't forget I have the canine sense of direction. I can't explain it, Lida, but all day I've

felt impelled toward these woods," he added.

"Maybe something *is* going to happen here," said Lida hopefully. "Oh, darling, if it only would! You do want it, too, don't you?"

"I want us to be alike again, dearest."

They walked for an hour among the old trees and Henry ran eagerly from tree to tree, sniffing. They startled woodchucks and squirrels, but nothing larger appeared. It was very quiet and peaceful and not too cold, even with the trees bare and patches of early snow left bere and there on the ground from the first fall of the season. After a while, they found themselves climbing until the level floor of the woods had become a hill.

Suddenly Henry darted through some underbrush toward a depression in the hillside, behind the bulk of a huge uprooted tree.

"You know," he called back in a voice that shook a little, "this could be dug out to make a good snug cave. I could do it myself with my paws."

"What of it? You don't want to live in a cave, do you?"

"I suppose not." The excitement deserted him. "I'm all confused. There was something very important I was thinking about and now I seem to have forgotten it completely."

"Poor Henry, you're tired. Let's go back. I'm tired, too."

"I guess it was all nonsense about werewolves, after all," said Henry in the car. "Well, it's a pretty good story, anyway. The agency ought to eat it up. You know, darling, I just remembered —vampires turn people they bite into their own kind. Why not werewolves?"

"But you're a weredog," said Lida absently. Then, sharply, "Henry, you wouldn't!"

"Just one little nip, darling— after we get home, of course."

WHEN rent day came around, Lida didn't turn up at Liz Gassingham's house.

Mrs. Sharp had a whole washing ready that Lida never called for.

Ed Monahan went out to chop wood, but found nobody home.

Mail piled up in the post office and the postmistress noted, as so often before, that most of it was adressed to the deceased Mr. Martindale. Why, sbe wondered loudly, didn't the woman tell his friends he had passed away—or deserted her, more likely? Something funny there!

But nobody moves fast in Farmington and over a week passed before a delegation, led by Mr. Bullis, went out to investigate.

The door was unlocked and the house was empty.

Everything was in order, with the table laid for breakfast and the

stove stuffed with wood and paper, ready to light.

The bed had been slept in and at its foot, where apparently that dog slept on a rug, lay a white flannel nightgown frivolously printed with sprigs of roses. All its buttons were off.

The rest of Lida's usual house attire lay over the back of a chair. Her shoes were beneath it, a pair of pink bedroom slippers beside the bed.

In the living room, they found a partly knitted maroon-and-beige sweater, evidently intended for the dog, and beside the typewriter a pile of manuscript.

Nobody ever saw Lida Martindale again.

IT was a year from the following summer that two adventurous boys from the village, egging each other on, raided the big woods. They came back, pale and frightened, to report that they had seen the dog that used to belong to Mrs. Martindale. It had emerged from the thick underbrush, they said, where the slope of the ground began to climb the hill. It had gone back to the wild, the boys claimed, and they had been lucky to get away without harm.

"You might have been killed. Somebody ought to go out there and shoot the thing," Mr. Bullis asserted.

"Aw," said the older of the two, aged fifteen, looking a bit sick, "it wasn't doing nobody no hurt. Nobody hardly ever goes there anyhow. I know *I* ain't going no more."

"There was a she-dog too, just like him, and some puppies," the younger boy blurted out.

"Shut up!" growled the older. "You want folks to think you're crazy? Jim was so scared, he got to seeing things, Mr. Bullis. There wasn't nothing there 'cept that big mutt of Mrs. Martindale's."

"I wasn't scared," Jim retorted. He caught his friend's eye and added hastily, "But I could of made a mistake."

"You must have, my boy," said Mr. Bullis kindly. "That dog was a Great Dane and there's never been another anywhere around here that I ever heard of."

"You idiot!" The fifteen-year-old scolded when the two boys were alone again. "Don't you ever open your yap about that again. They'd put us both in the booby-hatch."

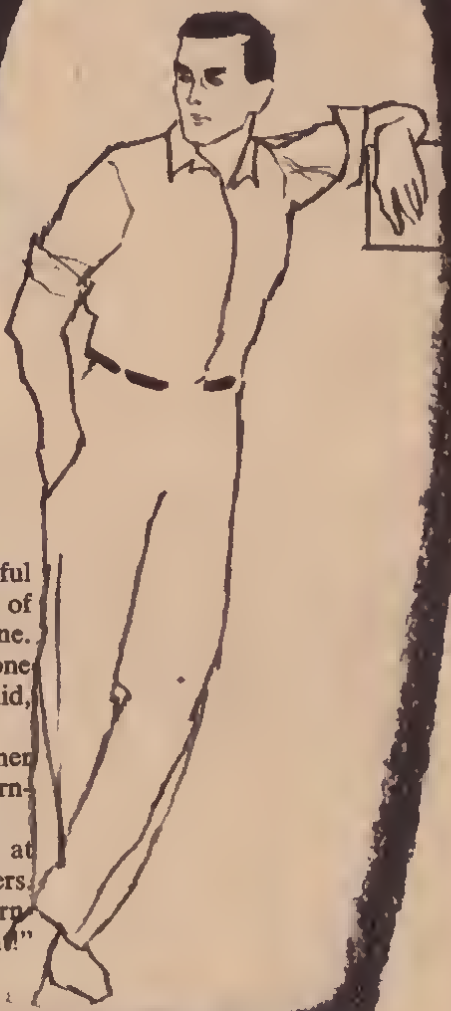
They kept far away from the woods after that and gradually they became convinced that they must have been out of their heads for a while. How *could* a dog have yelled, "Scram, you kids, or do you want me to bite?"

Miriam Allen de Ford


HELL

HELL TO PAY

By RANDALL GARRETT



Sam's demon could solve all pressing problems . . . as long as the iron was hot!

Illustrated by VIDMER

THE figure was beautiful and, because of its lack of attire, obviously feminine. She opened her eyes, took one look at Sam Carstairs and said, "Oh, *no!* Not *again!*"

Sam Carstairs frowned at her through the heavy smoke of burning incense. "Not what again?"

She grimaced and clutched at the air with long tapering fingers. "Gimme, gimme, gimme—morning, noon and night—*that's* what!"

Sam took a long drag on his cigarette. "So you are Archaezel," he said, still frowning. "That is, I presume you are."

The lushly feminine figure poked a finger in the air over the lines of the pentagram which surrounded her. She jerked the finger back and glowered at Carstairs. "Of course I'm Archaezel. You were expecting Mephistopbeles himself?"

"No," said Sam, "but you don't *look* like a demon."

Archaezel was testing the strength of the invisible wall that surrounded her—to no avail, for the pentagram held.

"What did you say?" she asked absently, still prodding.

"I said you don't look like a demon."

Archaezel frowned deeply, then, quite suddenly, changed appearance. Sam Carstairs threw his hands over his face and screamed.

"Is this more like it?" asked Archaezel nastily.

"*No!*" Sam yelled, his eyes still shut. "Can't we have something red, with horns and cloven hooves?"

"Medievalist, eh? All right, how's this?"

SAM opened one eye cautiously, then both. The thing still wasn't too pleasant to look at, but at least it resembled the popular concept of a demon.

"Yeah," said Sam, "that's much better." He took a slow, deep breath. His cigarette had dropped from his hand to the bare floor of his apartment. He retrieved it before it could scorch the varnish.

"Well?" said Arcbaezel quizzically. "I presume you brought me here for a purpose. Or am I to be kept as an exhibit?"

"Be quiet a minute," Sam said. "I want to think."

The demon leaned against the invisible wall of tbe pentagram, grinned malevolently and began to pick its teeth with the barb on the end of its tail.

Sam walked to the desk and carefully examined the ancient tome that lay open upon it. The spidery text looked no different than it had ten minutes earlier. Pages 71 and 72 were still missing. Page 73 began—

With these facts well in mind, the calling up may begin. Procure of nitre a handful from

Well, all right—so it had worked. Sam still didn't like it. He could picture what would bappen if the local press—or anyone else, for that matter—discovered that the District Attorney of Marlborough County was practicing witchcraft.

He still didn't know why be had tried the grotesque stunt.

It suddenly occurred to him that

he was a little frightened.

He faced the demon squarely. *"Begone!"* be said in a too-loud voice.

Archaezel stopped picking its teeth and peered at Sam with bottomless eyes. "How's that again?"

"I said -- uh -- *begone!"* Sam's voice was neither loud nor forceful this time. "Scram! Go to Hell!"

The demon looked flabbergasted. "Of all the half-baked mortals I ever met," it said slowly, "you take the cake! I'm wrenched all the way up here, forced to shift my morphology twice and then I'm given an order—the one order I can't obey. Tell me, mortal, are you by any chance a little weak-minded?"

Sam took a last deep drag from his cigarette before squashing it in an asbtray. He was having a bard time maintaining self-control. "I don't know whether I'm daffy or not, but I do know I--wait a minute! What do you mean, you can't obey that order?"

ARCHAEZEL waved toward the black, bair-covered book. "That spell you used is one of the most binding there is. I can't go back until I have served you."

Sam nodded. It made sense of a sort. His legal mind adjusted quickly to the scrambled logic of the situation.

"You have to do something, eh? Hmm. All right—uh—bring me some money. Ten dollars."

"Oh, sure," Archaezel sneered nastily. "I'm supposed to just trot right off and get it for you!" The voice became sarcastically sweet. "And just how am I supposed to get out of this cell?"

"Ob." Sam blinked. "Oh, yeah, tbe pentagram. How do I let you out?"

"Break the line, stupid!" The demon pointed toward the floor with a red claw.

Sam rubbed out the cbalk mark with a toe.

Without warning, Archaezel leaped with a triumphant leer and claws extended.

Sam stumbled backward, tripping over the rolled-up rug, and fell with a resounding thump. He waited, cringing, eyes shut tight, but nothing else happened.

When he opened his eyes, be couldn't find the demon for a second or two. Then be noticed that Archaezel was leaning over the desk, peering at the grimoire, trying to turn its pages, but unable to touch them.

"Hoo!" said the demon. "You really *did* use a potent one! I didn't realize this book was still in existence! I thought you were using the watered-down Ashirkhaton version."

Sam sat up indignantly. "What do you mean? And why did you try to scare me like that?"

"I mean the spell is powerful

enough to protect you from me. If you'd used the Ashirkhaton spell, I'd have killed you the instant you released me from the pentacle."

"Kill me?" Sam's voice sounded strangled. "For the love of Pete, *why?*"

"To get out of the contract, of course. The spell doesn't bind me once you're dead."

"You—you mean you don't—why do you want to get out of the contract?" Sam took a deep breath and tried to get his perspective back.

THE demon sat down on Sam's desk chair. In spite of the fact that Archaezel was glowing with the dull red of a hot iron, it didn't seem to affect the wood of the furniture any. Some sort of volitional thermostat control, Sam guessed.

"Let's look at it this way," it said. "We were given an original payment for our services many millions of years ago. Never mind who made the payment. The original deal was that these spells—" it waved a taloned hand at the grimoire—"would be given to mortal intelligences to be used as they saw fit. There were certain other restrictions, but we won't go into them now.

"The point is, it takes considerable—well, you might call it energy—to obey your commands. So we try to exact our secondary payment before we have to do anything. Unfortunately, this spell is too binding. If you die a natural death, I don't get your soul at all . . . and I can't touch you."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Sam fervently. There was only one thing to do—get rid of this evocation before it could do him any real harm. It had to serve him first, so . . .

"What about my ten dollars? Go get it!" he ordered.

The demon gave a curt nod and vanished.

During the five minutes Archaezel was gone, Sam Carstairs fortified himself with the bottle of bourbon he kept in the kitchen of his four-room apartment. It was his favorite brand and normally it slid down like liquid velvet. But this evening it burned a fiery trail all the way to his pylorus.

There was a sudden *pop,* like an exploding ballon, and a naked blonde stood in the middle of the kitchen, holding out a ten dollar bill.

Sam grabbed it and, before the startled demon could say anything, yelled, "Okay, you've served me! Now, *begone!*"

The blonde vanished without so much as a whisper.

The evening's experiment had been too much for Sam. He took another good dose of whiskey, two nembutal capsules and a hot

shower. Just before climbing into bed, he took another close look at the black grimoire.

"Tomorrow," he said with very little conviction, "I'll think it was all a dream."

II

NIKY Orloff was waiting for him in the outer office when Sam showed up at the courthouse the next morning. Niky was a small man with patent leather hair, who smiled engagingly at the District Attorney.

"Been waiting for you, Sam. How's for some coffee before you embark on the day's deliberations?"

Sam shook his head. "Can't do it, Niky. Too busy. Here's your book." He pulled the grimoire out of his briefcase and handed it to the little man.

"Oh? Did you try it?"

Sam deliberated only a few seconds. "No, of course not. I just skimmed through it for kicks. Thanks for lending it to me, but I don't see why you thought I'd be interested."

Niky shrugged. "Well, you always liked old books. I thought maybe—"

"Old books, sure. Shakespeare folios—things like that. But this magic stuff isn't for me. Frankly, I found it pretty dull."

Niky slipped the book into the pocket of his black coat. "You seemed interested enough in those scraps of the *Necronomicon.*"

Sam couldn't explain his aversion to the grimoire without admitting that he had lied about trying the spell. "That's a pretty famous book, remember. And I got those three pages of the Dee version at a good price."

"This one too high, Sam?" Niky knew that three hundred bucks was dirt cheap if the book was really an authentic copy of *The Workings of Night.*

Sam cut it short. "It's just that I don't want the book, Niky. Let's drop it."

"Okay, okay. How's for lunch?"

"Sure. Make it twelve-thirty."

"Right." Niky strolled out the door, and Sam went on into his office.

He hadn't been there ten minutes when the intercom buzzed. Sergeant Murfee said, "Sam, Ed Calhoun is on his way up, and he's hot as a four-alarm fire. I thought I'd warn you."

"Thanks. I wonder . . . oh-oh, here he comes now." He cut off the intercom quickly.

ED Calhoun didn't even bother to knock. He pushed open the door, walked to Sam's desk, leaned over it and said, "Where's that eighteen grand, Carstairs? I *want* it!"

"Eighteen grand? What eighteen

grand? Have you gone crazy?"

"Don't mess around with me, Sam," Calhoun said through too-white teeth. "I don't mind a raid now and then, but this is hijacking and I don't like it!"

Carstairs surveyed the pudgy, puffy face under the thatch of salt-and-pepper hair. The eyes beneath the shaggy brows were sparkling with hate.

Sam's voice remained cool. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Calhoun's face didn't change. "You know—Rogers' crap game. I thought it was funny that nobody was arrested. I thought it was screwy that you'd take the dough. I just talked to Chief Mitchell downstairs. He says there wasn't no raid last night. It was a lone job and *you* pulled it!"

Sam's eyes narrowed. "Don't get tough with me, Ed. You may think you run this town, but remember who's District Attorney. Now what in hell happened last night?"

Calhoun was unmoved. "You walked into the garage on Thirtieth Street and busted up an eighteen-gee crap game, that's what. All by your lonesome. *And* with a rod. The guys shelled out because they figured I got it fixed. When they find out I ain't got it fixed, they're pretty sore. I'm sore, too, Sam. *I want that eighteen grand!*"

It was too much for Carstairs. He stood up, towering a good four inches over the stockier Calhoun. "Listen, chum, I was at home last night—*all* night. *I* know it and *you* know it. You don't like me because I don't jump every time you say jump. Judge Harcourt and I won't knuckle under, the way you think we ought to, and you hate our guts for it.

"So far, you've kept ahead because you have Mayor Wayne, Sheriff Corbett and the city police under control. But you can't get rid of me and the Judge, so you try something like this. I suppose you've got half a dozen of your boys who can swear that I pulled a stickup on Rogers' crap game last night. Well, you might scare some of the guys, hut you don't scare me—and it's about time you knew it!"

Calhoun just looked at him with hate-filled eyes. "All right, hero—you don't scare. I've been getting sick of you for a long time. Now I warn you—if I don't get that eighteen grand back by tonight, I'll break you. I'll do *more* than break you."

He turned and walked out the door without another word.

CARSTAIRS shut the door after him. Calhoun was really mad. Why? Did he actually believe what he had said about a one-man raid on Hugh Rogers' floating crap game? If he did, it meant that

Rogers was pulling something. But why?

Sam Carstairs was honest. He kept one eye closed to a lot of things that went on around the county, hut there were two reasons for that. In the first place, he couldn't clean up Marlborough County singlehanded—and, in the second, he didn't believe in a lot of the blue laws the county had passed.

The state had local option, so Marlborougs County was dry — but that didn't prevent anyone from getting it across the river. Sam helieved that an occasional drink was good for a man, that a crap game or a horse-race was iun. If the majority of the county officials had heen hehind him, he would have cleaned up the county in jigtime. But they weren't, and Sam's conscience didn't bother him too much.

He had never had any trouble with Hugh Rogers, for instance. He'd even lost a little money to him, which shouldn't make any professional gamhler sore. Not that Sam liked Rogers—just the opposite. Hugh Rogers had killed at least two men, probahly more, hut nothing had ever been pinned on him.

However, the local Ministerial Association and the Marlston Civic Improvement League were constantly on Sam's neck to get rid of Rogers and his hoys. They didn't know that Rogers had Ed Calhoun protecting him.

Sam shook his head and sat down again at his desk. He still couldn't figure Calhoun's angle. Or Rogers'.

It was almost lunchtime when the phone rang. Sam, who had been working over a rohbery case windup, reached out and absently picked up the receiver.

"District Attorney Carstairs speaking."

"Sam? This is Bill."

"Yeah, Bill. How's the judge this morning?"

"All right, I guess." Judge Harcourt's voice sounded odd.

"What's the matter, Bill?"

"Did you know Hugh Rogers has sworn out a warrant for you?"

"No. What's the charge?"

"Armed rohbery. He claims that he and several of his friends were having a business meeting in the Alms Garage on Thirtieth Street last night, and you walked in and took eighteen thousand dollars from them at gunpoint."

Sam's stomach did flip-flops. "Yeah," he said slowly, "I heard ahout it earlier this morning. Ed Calhoun came in and accused me."

"I don't get it, Sam. What are they trying to pull? No jury in the country would convict you. What *did* you do over there last night?"

"Nothing. I wasn't anywhere near the joint. The story's strictly from China."

"It may cause trouble, Sam. I can't he on the hench if it comes to trial, you know."

"They'll have to get it hy a grand jury first. And I don't think they can. I'll see what's in the wind, Bill. Let me know if you turn anything up."

"Rigbt. So long, Sam."

Sam lowered the phone slowly into its cradle. There was something screwy going on. He didn't know wbat it was, hut it stank to high Heaven.

"I wish somehody'd get Rogers out of my bair permanently," he said.

III

SAM decided he might as well get some lunch. He put on his hat and went out into the hall, where he took the automatic elevator to the main floor.

Chief of Police Carl Mitchell was downstairs, talking to Sheriff Corhett. When he saw Sam, his eyes opened a little wider than usual, which wasn't much. "Hey, Sam! How'd you get hack upstairs so quick?"

"What do you mean?"

"You just walked out that door no more'n a minute ago." He pointed toward the front exit and blinked.

Sam grinned. "Must have been someone else, Carl. You aren't used to the gloom in this courthouse. We haven't got lights like City Hall."

"Yeah—maybe." The policeman didn't look convinced. "You beaded for lunch? I'll join you."

"Sure. Come ahead. I'm going to have a bite with Niky Orloff." Sam didn't particularly care for tbe Chief's company, but there wasn't much he could say. The Chief's piggish little face looked worried as fell into step with Carstairs.

"Sam, I wish you'd watch out for Ed Calhoun. I wish you wouldn't antagonize him."

"I'll look out for myself, Carl," Sam answered bluntly.

They walked the two blocks to the Greenleaf Café in silence. Niky Orloff was sitting in a hooth, sipping at a cup of coffee.

"How's the bookstore, Niky?" Chief Mitchell asked jovially.

"Fine—just fine. And what's with you?" His mouth was smiling, hut his eyes weren't. They never were.

"Okay. Say—I hear you're running for Alderman on an independent ticket in the next election. That right?"

Niky shrugged. "Who knows? I might even run for Mayor."

Mitchell's chuckle was heavy and emotionless.

"Chief Mitcbell?" It was a waitress.

"Yeah?"

"Telephone for you."

The Chief got up and headed toward tbe phone booth.

Sam stuck a cigarette in his mouth and talked around it as be lit it. "You're a funny guy, Niky," he said.

"Why so?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'd never suspect you'd be interested in politics. You just don't seem the type."

"One never knows," Niky said evasively.

"I suppose not. You may end up President."

Niky sbook bis bead. "No. I'm not native-born. The—*hey!* Here comes Piggy with a gleam in bis eye!"

CHIEF Mitcbell was returning from the phone booth, looking as tbough somebody had poured hot molasses in his pants pockets.

"Come on, Sam! No time for lunch! We'll see you later, Niky." He hustled Sam out of the Greenleaf before be even bad a chance to say good-by to the little book salesman.

"What's up, Carl?" Sam asked.

A patrol car pulled up in front of the café and they piled in.

"Murder," Mitchell said. "Somebody killed three men in broad daylight on South Elm. I didn't get all the details."

It took less than five minutes for the patrol car to reach South Elm Street. A crowd had filled the street outside the area blocked off by the police, but the cop driving the patrol car bonked them aside and pulled up to the curb near one of the other official cars.

When Mitchell and Carstairs climbed out they could see what had happened. Three bodies were lying untidily on the sidewalk, with blood soaking their shirt fronts. As far as Sam could tell, each had been drilled neatly through the heart by a single bullet.

Sam's gaze wandered from the bloodstain to the face of the nearest corpse and a shock ran through him. It was Hugh Rogers.

A cop was saying to Mitchell, "There were plenty of witnesses. At least a dozen people saw the car pull up to the curb. The guy stepped out, fired three times, climbed back in and drove off. The witnesses all agree on the description. Big guy, dark hair, good-looking. Gray business suit."

Sam frowned. There was something familiar about tbat description.

"What about the car?" Mitchell asked.

"Green '53 Studebaker. License number 110 dash 616."

Sam didn't need the testimony of the nearby witness who was pointing at him and shouting, "That's him!"

He knew the description fitted him perfectly and that the car was his own.

SAM Carstairs sat in his apartment staring moodily at a half-empty bottle of bourbon. He realized that the only reason he was not already in a cell at the city jail was the fact that he had been with Mitchell and Niky Orloff at the Greenleaf Café when the triple murder was committed. But what was the evidence of two people—three, counting the waitress—against the evidence of eight eyewitnesses?

The grand jury had already convened to decide whether or not District Attorney Samuel Carstairs should be indicted for murder. It didn't look too good.

Besides, there was no way of knowing how Mitchell would testify in court. Ed Calhoun had had a private talk with him that afternoon. If the Chief of Police should sound a little unsure of himself, or make a bad impression on the jurors, Sam's case would be shot to pieces.

All of which didn't worry Sam nearly as much as the situation itself. The big question was—who was parading around with a face like Sam Carstairs'? And why had he stuck up a crap game and killed off three men? By this time Sam accepted Ed Calhoun's statement about the crap game as fact. Ed had a perfect right to be sore.

Who was doing all this—and why? Sam had a theory, but he didn't want to test it.

He poured himself another drink and looked at the floor. The rug now covered the spot where he had drawn the pentagram and the chalk lines themselves had been scrubbed away, but Sam could still remember very plainly what he had seen there.

He took a deep breath and said, "Archaezel! Come *here!*"

A blonde stepped out of the kitchen, carrying Sam's other bottle of whiskey. "I'm here. What do you want now?"

Sam blinked. "Would you mind putting some clothes on?"

"I would mind. They're uncomfortable." Archaezel wriggled her hips provocatively.

"Put some clothes on!" Sam bawled.

A vague mist briefly concealed the demon's lush figure, and she emerged clad in something resembling a Doric chiton. It wouldn't have passed in public, but it was better than nothing.

Sam lit a cigarette nervously. "Why do you prefer to materialize looking like a blonde bathing beauty?"

ARCHAEZEL looked at him out of bright green eyes. "I'm a female," she said. "Not functionally, but psychologically. I automatically take the form of a female human unless I concentrate on something else, as I did last night."

Sam let it pass. "I thought I told you to go away then."

"I did, didn't I?"

"I meant back where you came from."

"I told you I couldn't do that," she said, pouring herself a healthy slug from the bottle.

"You said you could after you served me," Sam pointed out logically. "You served me by getting that ten dollar bill."

The demon shook her golden head. "Sorry, you misunderstood. The service contract is for life. I have to serve you until you die."

Sam slumped. "That's what I was afraid of." He smoked in morose silence for a few minutes. It made sense after a fashion. Just because that kind of a contract was illegal in the United States didn't keep it from being binding in Hell.

Apparently Archaezel could no more resist obeying his command than Sam himself could keep from falling if he stepped out of an airplane without a parachute. There was no telling what the natural laws of Hell were, but he suspected they were quite a bit different from those he was used to.

"Tell me how you got that ten bucks," he said, making a command of it so that Archaezel would have to obey.

"You know perfectly well how I got it. I made myself look like you and stuck up the crap game." The blonde swallowed half a glass of whiskey without a shudder, gasp or blink.

"Uh-huh." Sam nodded. "And you also rubbed out Hugh Rogers and his pals when I said I wished someone would get them out of my hair permanently."

"Your wish is my command," Archaezel said airily. She took another healthy slug.

"Yeah, but I'm the one who gets framed for murders and stick-ups." Sam was no longer afraid of the demon. As long as it kept the form of a human female, he felt he could cope with it. "You're trying to get me killed," he continued. "Tell me why—if I'm not asking too much."

The blonde sighed. "I want to bring the contract to a quick termination, that's all. Nothing personal, I assure you. But—" she leveled a finger at Sam's nose—"suppose *you* had to spend years and years running around all over the universe to satisfy the personal whims of every Tom, Dick and Harry that came along. And all at your own expense too."

"There's more to it than that," said Sam coldly. He was trying to remember everything the demon had said earlier.

"Well, yes. I have to see that you're killed or I won't be able to carry you back with me. In other words, I won't get paid for

my duties. That's slavery and, if I get caught in it, it's my own fool fault."

SAM'S brain was working furiously. The demon was telling the truth, but not all of it. Sam, however, was used to digging facts from unwilling witnesses. The difficulty in this instance was that Archaezel's world was so different from his own, he was unable to make any assumptions about it.

Suddenly, Sam saw a gleam of light. "Look here, my soul is worth something to you—something about the equivalent of money here on Earth?"

Archaezel nodded. "That's pretty close."

"When I called you up here, it cost you 'money' to come, and it will cost you 'money' to stay. Right?"

She nodded again, her eyes narrowing. "Right, so far. Only call it 'energy,' not money. It's more of a barter system."

"I get it," Sam said. "It takes a lot of energy to stay here on Earth —a whale of a lot. And it takes even more to obey my commands." He hesitated. "My soul, whatever *that* is, will bring enough energy to make you a profit—*if you get me in time!* Meanwhile, you're losing energy hand over fist."

"That's not all of it," Archaezel snarled. Sam noticed the eyes were no longer green, but the bright, glowing orange of hot coals. "I have a limited energy reserve. When I run through that, a debit starts to build up against me in Hell. If I don't bring you back to get my debts paid, I'm—*punished.*"

Sam shuddered. From the way she emphasized that last word, he felt quite sure he would not want to know the punishment.

"It's like this," the demon went on. "Suppose you had a million dollars in the bank. You'd be rich by normal standards. Now, suppose you were forced to live in a hotel where the rent was a hundred thousand a day and a bellboy's tip a couple of thousand. Food is between twenty and fifty thousand a meal. Your million won't last long. Now, suppose your bank goes ahead and honors your checks, with the understanding that, when you leave the hotel, you'll pay up or else. That's my position. In Hell, I'm considered a fairly wealthy and powerful demon. But if I have to stay here very long, I'm going to be in debt."

"How long?" asked Sam.

"I don't know. The time rate is different for one thing, and the exchange fluctuates. But the quicker I get you, the better off I am."

Sam said nothing more. His only chance was to outwit the demon on her own terms, and he realized he'd better keep any further ideas strictly to himself.

IV

WITH a demon at his beck and call, Sam Carstairs had the world by the tail. He could do anything he wanted. He could, he supposed, even clean up Marlborough County, singlehanded.

One hitch was that, at any time, the demon might dope out some way of killing him indirectly. It could not be done directly because of the spell he had used. That gave Sam an idea. He picked up the phone and dialed Niky Orloff's home. "Orloff speaking."

"Niky, this is Sam. I've changed my mind. I'll buy that book. Can I get it tonight?"

"Sorry, Sam," Niky apologized, "no can do. Sold it to another customer."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you that, Sam. I'm sorry."

"Okay, Niky. Forget it."

He slammed down the receiver and frowned. Come to think of it, the book wouldn't do much good, anyway. It was the missing page that contained detailed information about the uses of the spell . . . and probably its dangers as well. Were there any other flies in the ointment? He wondered.

He looked at Archaezel. "Can you read my mind?"

"Naturally," she sneered.

"Very well. I order you not to do so."

The growl of frustrated rage from the demon's throat was enough to convince Sam that he had made a wise move. Now he could think in peace—or at least in privacy.

The point was, how could he convince the grand jury that another person had killed Rogers? When they heard about the war-

rant Rogers had sworn out, they'd have a motive. And with eyewitnessess.

THERE was one thing he might do. It would require a lot of safeguards, but it might work.

He turned to the demon. "Archaezel, I have some orders to give, hut I want you to wait until I say *go* hefore you carry them out. Understand?"

"I'm not stupid, chum," she said, finishing the last of the liquor.

"All right. I want you to assume my form and check in at the Larchmont Hotel using the name of William Jones. When you're in the room, lock the door and make sure there are no witnesses. Then, materialize a body identical to mine, but with different fingerprints—somebody's they can't check—say, those of George Washington. Leave fingerprints around the room, but none of mine. Arrange the hody so that it looks as if it shot itself. Suicide, see? Place a note near it which says, 'I stuck up Hugh Rogers' crap game, and I killed him. I used the District Attorney's car for the joh.'

"Leave the note unsigned, and don't have any other writing on the paper. Use hotel stationery. Then cause a sharp explosion, like a pistol shot, and come hack here immediately."

He paused trying to find loopholes in the order. He decided there were none. *"Go!"* he said, and the demon vanished.

Sam calmly lit another cigarette. This should do the trick. When they found the hody, the police would realize that a douhle had committed the crimes. With George Washington's fingerprints

on the corpse, they would never figure out the identity, but at least they would know it wasn't Sam Carstairs.

He settled back to await developments. Half an hour passed.

Ping!

The blonde was back. The chiton was gone again, but Sam didn't say anything.

"All done as I said?" Sam wanted to know.

"Certainly."

"Fine. Now take me to that hotel room instantly — *without harming me in any way!"*

Ping!

It gave Sam the same feeling as watching a movie scene change quickly. His own room was gone, and the hotel room surrounded him.

The sight of his own corpse—or a reasonable facsimile thereof —was disconcerting at first, but he soon got used to it.

Out in the hall, a voice said, "It sounded like a shot!"

Another said, "Where from?"

Sam knew he wouldn't have long to look around. Everything *looked* perfect. The demon hadn't slipped up or planted any booby traps, as far as he could tell.

The suicide note was clutched securely in the dead man's left hand, and a revolver was in the right. The bullet hole was in the right temple. All according to Hoyle.

Then he heard another voice in the hall. "I'll bet anything it was four-eleven. I thought it was funny that the D.A. would check in under the name of Jones." It was the house detective.

"Okay, Archaezel," Sam whispeed, "take me back home."

Ping!

HE was back in his own room. He pointed to the chair. "Now, just sit there quietly until I think of something else."

With the problem of the murders solved, he could devote his attention to figuring out a way to get rid of the demon. He toyed briefly with the idea of making himself rich and powerful, but dismissed it quickly. It wasn't that he didn't like the idea of wealth and power, but he preferred to get it through his own efforts. His ego demanded it. He didn't like anything handed to him on a silver platter.

Using the demon might prove dangerous. The best-laid plans could backfire unless every loophole was covered. Evidently, the demon couldn't just go about doing things to get him in trouble. It had to be something connected with the orders he gave. The whole problem deserved careful thought.

It was almost midnight when Sam heard voices in the hall. By then, the police would have check-

ed the prints of the corpse and found them not his. They were obviously here to tell him about it . . . or to check on the body.

Chief Mitchell was saying, " . . . have to find out what this is all about. Here's Sam's apartment."

Sam waited for the knock, but there was none. Instead, he heard a key being fitted into the lock. He didn't move as the door swung open.

Chief Mitchell's mouth dropped open, his eyes bugging out of his piggy little face, while behind him, the landlord and two policemen assumed similar expressions.

"What's wrong, Carl?" Sam asked, keeping his voice level. Hadn't they checked the fingerprints yet? They must still think it was he in the hotel room.

The Chief's shock didn't last long. He snapped his jaw shut and drew his Police Positive. "All right, you! You're under arrest! Snap the cuffs on him, boys!"

Only Sam Carstairs heard the smothered chuckle from the chair where the invisible Archaezel sat.

V

THE city jail was distinctly uncomfortable. Sam's headache didn't help any, either.

Archaezel had put another one over. The body's fingerprints were different, all right. *Hah!* A lot of good *that* did!

Sam remembered the story about the Irishman who had captured the leprechaun and forced him to point out the tree where the pot of gold was buried. He had tied a cloth around the tree to mark it while he went home to get a spade. He had made the pixie promise not to remove the cloth until he got back.

The leprechaun was as good as his word. When Paddy returned with the spade, every tree in the forest had an identical cloth tied around it!

Archaezel had pulled the same gag. The demon had changed the fingerprint records! Every file in the nation now had the corpse's fingerprints registered under the name of Samuel Carstairs!

The cops didn't know whom they had in the city jail, but they were sure it wasn't Sam Carstairs. Fingerprints don't lie!

How do you like that, George Washington? Sam thought bitterly. *I've got you on the records now, me bucko!*

The one thing Sam couldn't understand was the plastic imitation of a gun that had been clutched in the corpse's hand, according to the police. Why hadn't Archaezel used a real one? What was the purpose behind that?

There were footsteps in the corridor, and the turnkey showed up. A key clanked in the lock.

"Awright, Carstairs, come on.

The Chief wants to talk to you."

Sam sighed wearily and followed the jailer out.

There had to be some way of getting out of this jam! He could always call on Archaezel, of course, but he was beginning to suspect that any further orders to the demon would probably get him in deeper soup.

He solemnly promised himself that he would leave the demon strictly alone.

THE jailer led him to the rear of the jail, where Chief Mitchell and two detectives were waiting in a small room.

Sam recognized the room. The hard chair under the single glaring lamp had one purpose . . . and only one purpose.

"Sit down, son," the Chief said, waving toward the chair.

It was the *son* that made Sam really aware of what was coming. Mitchell always called his victims *son* before he worked them over thoroughly.

Sam sat, sweating, waiting for the Chief to speak.

"I've got a theory, son," Mitchell said. "I want you to listen to it carefully and tell me where I'm wrong.

"You came to this town a year ago. You discovered you looked like poor Sam and decided it would be nice to step into his shoes. So you studied him—watched him. Then you kidnapped him and held him prisoner while you took over his job. Sam didn't have a family, so that part of it was easy.

"Everything went fine till the night before last. You stuck up Rogers' crap game, figuring Rogers wouldn't dare say anything. You figured wrong, so you had to rub out Rogers.

"Then, last night, you really got panicky. You took Sam up to the hotel, shot him, and made it look like suicide. But you didn't think of the fingerprint check. How does that theory sound, son?"

"It has holes in it big enough to throw a cat through," Sam said calmly.

"Oh, it does, does it? Well, I'm real sorry to hear you don't like it. Why don't *you* tell us what did happen, then?"

Sam frowned. How could he explain? The true story would certainly sound sillier than the Chief's. Mitchell's tale was illogical but his own was fantastic.

"What's your name, son?" Mitchell asked.

"Samuel Carstairs."

One of the detectives slapped Sam across the cheek hard enough to make his head ring.

"Give us your right name, son."

"Sam—" Whap!

"What's your last name?"

"Carst—" Whap!

"You're real cute, son, but it

ain't gettin' you anywhere. Why don't you tell us the truth?"

Sam didn't know how long it went on. He had seen Mitchell's handiwork before—on the colored kid, for instance. Mitchell didn't go in for reasoning or logic. He believed that the way to catch a crook was to pick up the nearest suspect and knock a confession out of him. His motives were the same, and his methods hardly differed from those of the Spanish Inquisition.

THE colored kid that had been picked up for a knifing on McGuire Street six months ago had spent ten weeks in the hospital for "resisting arrest," although Sam had found witnesses to testify that the kid was innocent.

Things like that never made an impression on Chief Mitchell, though. He picked one man as guilty and, no matter what the evidence was, that man stayed guilty. Evidence was only something you framed to convince a jury *after* you had decided who was guilty.

Mitchell picked his cops for psychological traits similar to his own.

"My hands're gettin' sore, Chief," one of the cops complained. "This guy's head is too hard."

"I hate to get rough with you, son. I really do," the Chief said. "Herh, you better go get the persuaders."

In a few minutes, they were applying short lengths of ruhber hose with great finesse to his head, stomach and kidneys.

Sam just couldn't take it. A sea of confusion, blackness and pain closed in over his head.

When he woke up, it was strangely silent in the room. He blinked his eyes against the harsh light and tried to sit up. When he saw what was on the floor, he gagged. After the nausea passed, he looked painfully around the room. Archaezel was sitting in the chair which had recently heen occupied by Chief Mitchell. She was looking at him with detachment.

"What happened?" Sam asked. His lips were so puffed that it came out "Whuh hom?"

"You said they ought to get a taste of their own medicine," she grinned her malevolent grin. "They did."

"Are they dead?"

"Very."

Sam groaned, not only from the pain. He now had another triple murder chalked up against him.

OVER in the corner of the room was a large water cooler. Sam avoided the bodies on the floor as he stumbled over to it. He hegan splashing water on his face.

Several times he thought of asking the demon to make him well again, but changed his mind each time, not trusting what fiend-

ish ideas Archaezel might get.

The beating hadn't really done any serious damage to him. He was covered with bruises, and his clothes were a mess from the bloody nose, but he wasn't badly hurt.

The problem of the plastic gun came back. As he dried his face gingerly with a paper towel, he asked, "Why did you put a phony gun in that corpse's hand? You'd have got me in a deeper jam if you'd put my own there."

The demon had a petulant look on her face. "I know. But I couldn't do it. A gun's made of cold iron, or steel, which is the same thing, you know. I can't handle that stuff. If they examine the shoes of that corpse, they'll find brass nails in the shoes."

"Hmm. Then what did you use to kill Hugh Rogers?"

"Lead bullets. The gun was just an illusion."

There was a knock at the door. "Hey, Chief! Phone for you!"

Sam recognized the voice of the turnkey. The door, luckily, was locked.

"Can you imitate Mitchell's voice?" Sam whispered to Archaezel. The demon nodded scornfully. "Okay. Say, 'Who's calling, Lou?' "

She complied and the turnkey said, "Niky Orloff, Chief."

Sam whispered further instructions and Archaezel said, "Tell

him I'm busy. I'll call him back."

"Right." The turnkey left.

Sam sat down and thought for long minutes, carefully keeping his eyes off the things on the floor. Finally, he turned again to the demon. He hated to ask for anything more, but he knew it was his only out. Only Archaezel could get him out of the jam she had got him into. And besides, he felt he was beginning to get the knack of controlling her.

"Can you make me invisible? I mean, so that other people can't see me, but otherwise remain just as I am?"

"Certainly. You ask the stupidest questions, mortal."

"I'm not taking any chances. Go ahead then, make me invisible."

"All right," she said nastily, "so you're invisible."

Sam looked down at himself. He could see no change, but he could probably take Archaezel's word for it.

THE door had a Yale lock which could only be opened from the outside with a key. He turned the inside bolt and looked out. No one was in sight.

"You stay in this cell and don't do anything until I call you," he whispered to the demon. "And don't let anybody see *you,* either!"

He stepped out into the hall and pushed the door shut behind him. The lock clicked into place. Good,

so far. He walked toward the identification room.

Just as he reached it, Lou came out. The turnkey's face suddenly acquired a very peculiar expression.

"Clothes," he said softly, in awe. "Bloody clothes—hangin' in mid-air!"

Sam's fist swung up and hit the astounded jailer. Lou collapsed soundlessly.

Sam quickly dragged him to a nearhy janitor's closet and pushed him in. Then he peeled off his clothes and locked them in the closet with Lou. In her inevitahle efforts to trip him up, Archaezel had made Sam invisihle as he had ordered, hut she had left his shirt and pants as visihle as ever.

Stark naked and feeling more than a little silly, Sam strode holdly into the identification room. No one had heard him hit the turnkey, evidently, for the two officers in the room were talking quietly about the afternoon hasehall game. One of them glanced up as the door opened, hut gave no sign of having seen Carstairs. He must have attrihuted the opening door to a draft, for he ignored it.

Sam walked over to the fingerprint files. His fingerprints had been taken the night before, hut the cards shouldn't have gone out to the F.B.I. yet.

He sighed with relief when he saw that all five cards were still there. Since all the other files had heen changed, these cards were the only records of his fingerprints.

But how to get them out? If the two policemen on the far side of the room saw cards floating out the door, there was no telling what they might do. He grinned. He might as well have some fun. He stepped into the hall and pushed a switch of the red box on the wall.

HE almost collided with the two cops as they rushed out in answer to the roaring fire alarm.

Sam was not the type to turn in a false alarm—it was against his principles. Accordingly, he struck a match to the papers in the wastehasket. As soon as they were blazing merrily, he fed the fingerprint cards into them, one by one.

Then he walked into Chief Mitchell's office to make sure nothing else there could be connected with him.

The phone rang. Sam picked it up. "Yeah?" he said, in a fair imitation of Mitchell's tone.

"Carl?" It was Mayor Wayne. "The boss is a little teed off at you."

Sam, wondering why Ed Calhoun should be sore at Mitchell, said, "Why?" He had to stick to monosyllahles. He wasn't the imitator Archaezel was.

"He called you a few minutes

ago and you told him to hold his horses. He doesn't like things like that, you know. You'd better talk to him. Now, Carl!" There was a click at the other end.

Something in Sam's brain clicked, too. He hung up the phone and wiped off possible prints with a Kleenex from the box on the desk.

When he walked back out in the hall, the place was a madhouse. The two cops from the identification room were trying to explain that they had not turned in the fire alarm, in spite of being in the same room with the fire. Down the hall, a cop and a fireman were pounding on the third-degree room, calling frantically for the Chief. And another fireman was lifting a dazed turnkey out of a heap of bloody clothes in the janitor's closet.

Sam left in a hurry. Things were beginning to fall into a pattern and he had some checking to do.

VI

SIRENS were wailing all around Courthouse Square. From a bench, Sam and the demon watched two State Police cars pull up in front of City Hall, a block away. The Mayor's car was there already, as was Ed Calhoun's.

"Interesting fuss, isn't it?" Archaezel asked conversationally.

"It is, indeed," Sam agreed. "And it's going to get more interesting as time goes on."

The demon frowned. "I suppose you plan to do something about it?"

"Yep. I'm going to start by asking you some questions. All this mess has now become clear as day to me. I want some information from you and I want it straight."

It took better than half an hour to pump all he wanted out of Archaezel. Everything he had ever learned about cross-examination he used against the sly demon.

Archaezel had to tell the truth, but there was nothing in the Laws of Darkness that required it to tell the *whole* truth. Sam had to attack each question from every possible angle and every hint the demon dropped had to be pounced upon and wrung dry of information.

When satisfied, Sam said, "Okay, let's go. First, take me to the Mayor's house."

Ping!

Sam looked around the Mayor's library. "Where are the papers? The letters and contracts and stuff."

Archaezel pointed toward a wall. "The Mayor has no imagination. They're behind that painting, in a wall-safe."

"*All* the incriminating material?"

"*All* of it," the demon verified.

Sam walked over to the safe and

pushed the painting aside. "What's the combination?"

Archaezel told him and he began spinning the dial. But when the door finally swung open, it was accompanied by the raucous clamor of a ringing bell.

The demon had failed to mention an alarm.

Sam scooped the papers into a bundle and stuffed them into a heavy manila envelope. He heard footsteps pounding up the stairway.

"Next stop, Ed Calhoun's!" Sam ordered.

Ping!

The procedure was approximately the same, except that Calhoun had hidden his correspondence more carefully than the Mayor. It didn't matter to Archaezel, though.

There were two more hurried visits. One to the late Chief Mitchell's residence and one to the sheriff's house. More papers were added to the bundle.

AS he added the last sheaf, which had been recovered from a locked trunk in the Sheriff's basement, he grinned at the fuming Archaezel. "This does it! Now to Judge Harcourt's house."

Ping!

Sam looked around and blinked. Wherever he was, it most certainly was not the Judge's residence. An even, gray light surrounded him. Up, down, right and left, it was the same—a gray blankness. It wasn't quite like fog—no mist covered the surroundings. It was simply that there weren't *any* surroundings.

He was panic-stricken for a moment. "Archaezel!"

"I'm here."

"Where are we? I told you to take me to Judge Harcourt's house!"

He couldn't see the demon. He discovered he couldn't see himself either.

"We're in Limbo," the demon said. "Hmm. Now let's see—I *know* I turned right. Something must have—" She broke off abruptly.

"Limbo?" Sam's voice strangled. "How'd we get *here*?"

"We were pushed off course. It's a nice little spell, but not much use. He can't keep us here."

"Get us to the Judge's house!"

Ping!

Sam looked around again. It took him several seconds to recognize the room as the Judge's library. The bookshelves were gone, the fireplace bricked up, the walls covered with gaudy-looking wallpaper and a Hollywood bed replaced the sofa.

A door opened and a red-head dressed in a filmy negligée made of some metallic fiber stepped into the room, followed by a tall young man in an odd-looking uniform.

"Come on in, spaceman," said the red-bead. "Gee, you're cute!"

SAM grabbed Archaezel's arm. "Wbat's happened now?" be whispered savagely.

"Temporal displacement," she said. "This is the right place, but the wrong time." Her grin was positively lewd. "Evidently, this neighborhood ain't what it used to be."

"Get us back to 1953!" Sam whispered frantically. The spaceman bad drawn a peculiar looking gun and was peering warily around the room for the source of the whispers. He said, "Sounds like one of those damned Venerian—"

Ping!

The room was suddenly familiar again, but it kept flickering, as though it were illuminated by a stroboscope.

"*Now* what's going on?" Sam asked exasperatedly.

"Oh, the silly damn fool mortal thinks be can fuss around with me. He's got us in a partial time stasis of about a tenth of a second duration. He thinks he can keep you from delivering those papers. If he keeps it up, he's gonna make me mad!"

The flickering stopped abruptly.

"Everything okay, now?" asked Sam.

"Perfect. It is now one tenth of a second since we left the Sheriff's."

"Fine." Sam took the papers and put them on the Judge's desk. Then he grinned nastily and added a note. It read—

Bill:

I havn been trying to get this evidence to you for some time. They may try to kill me.

Good luck.

He signed bis name with a flourish. Tbat would fix 'em! Harcourt might worry about this mix-up for the rest of his life, but Sam knew that be'd eventually rationalize it so it would make sense.

He instructed the demon to make sure that the papers couldn't be removed by anyone but the Judge and then said, "Okay, Arcbaezel, let's attack!"

VII

THE clerk in Niky Orloff's bookstore didn't even look up as Sam tiptoed in.

Sam knew Niky lived in the rear of the store, so be beaded in that direction, expecting almost anything. The door was locked, but a whispered order to Archaezel soon opened it.

As far as anyone knew, no one but Niky bad ever seen the inside of Niky's home. He could see wby, as soon as he entered. The place looked like the interior of a medieval alchemist's laboratory. There

were rows of oddly shaped bottles lining the shelves and, here and there, a human skull leered evilly from its empty sockets.

In one corner stood an altar-like structure with a black velvet cloth covering it. The illumination for the entire room came from a black wax candle set on the altar.

"I've been expecting you, Sam."

Sam jumped. Niky Orloff was standing behind him with an old-fashioned pistol pointed at bis middle.

"Don't do anything rash, Sam," Niky advised. "This gun has a cold iron ball in it. Your demon is powerless against that."

Sam took his advice. He didn't move or say anything.

"So you doped it all out, eh, Sam?" Niky asked in his flat voice.

Sam nodded. "Sure. It's pretty obvious. You're using black magic to take over Marlston for your own toy city. You figured it all out very neatly. But I wouldn't fit into your political schemes and neither would the Judge. So you tried to get rid of us.

"You started with me. I don't know what sort of spell you used, but you forced me to call up Arcbaezel the other night. *You're* the one who tore out the warning page. Evidently, you've never called up any demons yourself, have you? Scared of them, Niky? Your spells aren't very powerful without a Black Alliance, are they? You got Calhoun working for you, and the Mayor, and the very late Carl Mitchell, but you couldn't do anything against an honest man, could you? The best you could do was make us indifferent."

Orloff's face was emotionless.

"But that wasn't enough," Sam added, "you had to destroy us in some way. You knew that a demon does everything in its power to kill its possessor, but you didn't take into account the fact that an honest man doesn't necessarily want power or money. You didn't look far enough ahead. It's true your trap worked, but it wasn't good enough or strong enough. You're licked, Niky!"

NIKY'S expression didn't change. It was still stiff and cold. "I'll admit I didn't think of your using the demon to clean up the city, but don't think I'm licked. All I have to do is kill you and the demon will be gone—taking you along to Hell.

"Cold iron is the most potent weapon against demons, Sam. I know bow to control magic, even if you don't. A lot of men in the past have tried to make a profit out of black magic, but their greed overcame them. They couldn't be satisfied with a Marlston—they had to try for the whole world.

"They never got very far, because they didn't know the trap that was waiting for them." His

forefinger tightened on the trigger. "And now, good-by, Sam!"

He fired.

Nothing happened.

Sam stood there, grinning at him. "I knew you were waiting for me, Niky. I had Arcbaezel do a little advance scouting. She can't stop *cold* iron, but you forget something—when you fired it from the gun, *the bullet heated up!* Hold him, Archaezel! And don't let him talk!"

Niky Orloff froze, unable to move.

"Your mistake, Niky, was not learning how to control a demon. Black magic is a tool. You can't expect the tool to do *all* the work for you. You've got to keep your commands simple and to the point.

"It's like a law or a contract. The more complex it gets, the easier it is to poke a hole in it. When you try to cover every possibility, or when your orders are too general, you give the demon too much leeway.

"But guys like you give orders to *get* big tbings and *do* big things. And you get tripped up. Tougb, Niky." He looked around cautiously. "Where are the papers, Archaezel—the ones I'm looking for?"

"Behind the big red jar over there."

Sam got them, then faced Niky again. "I'm going to send these papers to Judge Harcourt together with the ones from Ed Calhoun and tbe Mayor. There's enough evidence in them to put all of you behind bars for a long time. Naturally, I'll enclose my own written confession. With me dead, the whole thing will hold up in court.

"But what will I do with you?"

Niky, held by Archaezel s invisible arms, said nothing. Sam stepped closer and peered at Orloff s face in the dim glow of the flickering candle, and saw that the decision had already been taken out of his hands.

"Archaezel! Damn you, you've killed him!"

Her chuckle was pure evil. "You said bold him and keep him quiet! I figured the best place to hold him was by the throat."

"NINE hundred and fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety. Seventeen tbousand, nine hundred and ninety dollars. It's all bere. Thank you, Arcbaezel. I think I'm being honest in keeping the rest of the money from Rogers' crap game. It has no other claimants, so I'll consider it lost-and-found."

He looked at himself in the mirror. If anything, bis face was better looking than before. No one would ever recognize him as Sam Carstairs. He glanced out the window at Waikiki Beach glowing whitely in the afternoon sun.

"This is the 'life." He grinned happily. Then he turned and

glowered at the hlonde sitting on the hed. "Except for you, that is."

Now that he had everything he wanted to start a new life, he thought he might as well get rid of Archaezel, once and for all. He had the plan nicely worked out, and now was as good a time as any to carry it out.

"Archaezel, the next time I say the word go, you will carry out the orders I am ahout to give you. From then on, you will he unahle to hear or obey any further orders from me."

He glanced out the hotel room window again and licked his lips nervously. "You will bury yourself at a point twenty feet under this hotel, make yourself invisihle and do ahsolutely nothing. And you will stay in that exact spot, without moving, until I die."

He thought it over carefully once more, to make sure he had covered all the loopholes. The demon couldn't be of any danger to him then—he hoped.

He held his hreath, then expelled his last order to Archaezel, *"Go!"*

The resultant explosion knocked Sam colder than the polar ice cap.

WHEN he woke up in the hospital, he opened his eyes and asked the pretty Oriental nurse what had happened.

"Nothing serious, sir," said the nurse. "You have a slight concussion, hut the doctors feel you'll he all right."

"But what happened?"

She frowned. "The scientists from the University say that it looks as though a meteor struck the hotel. But it looks like the meteor went *out* into space, instead of falling."

"I see," said Sam, closing his eyes again. "Very mysterious."

Trust old Archaezel—vindictive to the end. He had told her to *stay in that exact spot*, and she had taken him literally. The Earth, in its course through space, had moved away from *that exact spot* with meteoric velocity, and Archaezel had ripped through the hotel hy just lying still.

"Nasty wench," said Sam, dozing off.

The nurse looked hurt, sniffed and stalked out of the room.

Randall Garrett

Then— nothing

Naturally a father

should give away the bride.

But to what?

By D. V. GILDER

"NO!" said Pop O'Brien. "There'll be no wedding in this house today. None. Do you hear?"

"But why?" Big Dave Clark was honestly puzzled. "It's only moving the date up two weeks and Nancy wants to go with me."

"Please, Pop," said Nancy, perching herself on the arm of his chair by way of further blandishment.

"You're being an old fool, Mike," said Mom O'Brien, her scowl as out of place on the usually beaming face as one of the Little Sweeps' high pointed hats would have been on the curly gray hair. "Every normal girl has a right to get married, so Nancy might just as well do it today. If it's Dave you're objecting to, you should have done it long ago."

"You know it isn't that," he grumbled. "Haven't we both said all along that we couldn't ask for a finer son-in-law?"

"Well, if it's just the transfer,"

Illustrated by TONY

Dave broke in eagerly, "probably I forgot to explain. It's really a promotion with quite a substantial raise. The only drawback is having to start work there in the morning."

"And that's the whole trouble," said Pop. "Heading for San Francisco the minute you're married. The answer is still no. I don't care who Nancy marries, she'll stay right in this house, where I can keep an eye on her for the full twenty-four hours after the ceremony. That settles it."

"Oh, so that settles it, does it?" asked Mom, giving an angry twitch like she might be settling her fighting harness more firmly. "And because your ancestors were unfortunate enough to bring a bit of the fey side of Ireland over here with them, our Nancy is supposed to be an old maid, is she? Is that what you want?"

"She doesn't have to be an old maid," answered Mr. O'Brien. "There are plenty of other men right here in Glendale. Let her pick one of *them.*"

"Pop!" Nancy's squeal was pure horror.

"A fine solution, coming from a man I said no to a dozen times," scoffed Mrs. O'Brien. "Anyway, what makes you think you could do a better job of guarding Nancy than Dave could?"

"Because I know how important it is and Dave doesn't." And, of course, Mr. O'Brien had her there.

FOR one reason or another, the right time never had come to tell Dave about the Little Sweeps. Or about how they never gave up. Or that a whole ocean was no more trouble for them to cross than a drop of water, when they were on the trail of an O'Brien.

"Well, why aren't you telling him then?" Mom, as usual, came up with a practical solution.

"Me?" asked Pop, getting a mite red. After all, when you come right down to it, the tale was a kind of fairy-story thing for one grown man to tell another.

"Please, Pop," said Nancy again, reaching a soft arm around his neck. "You can't object if Dave *knows* what he has to do."

Mr. O'Brien sighed and looked around nervously at the corners of the room. "I'd better be startin' at the beginnin'," he said, lapsing into the faint brogue he thought the story called for. "Well, in old Erin, the O'Briens took the back of nobody's hand. A power in the land they were, with their own castle and people to do the cleaning of it. And that's how they met the wee ones who tended the sweeping of Ireland's chimneys. The Little Sweeps went through the land twice a year and woe to the castle or hut that hired another cleaner. They—"

"Pop," Nancy broke in, her eyes on the clock. "Just say they were overly sensitive on the matter of their pride. A bride needs a little time to dress."

"Okay, okay," said Mr. O'Brien. "It's a better story the other way, though. Now, it so happened that, in tending a chimney of Castle O'Brien, one of the Sweeps fell off his ladder. And the Black O'Brien, Lord of the manor, watching from below with his new bride, was even blacker with the contact that sent him sprawling. He rose, put a hand to his dirk and swooped down on the poor Little Sweep."

"Killed him?" Dave was shocked.

"Nah, you can't kill *them*. If the O'Brien hadn't remembered that and gone ahead with his stabbing, there wouldn't be any curse. Any self-respecting Sweep could forgive a stab or two, but the schoolboy type of paddling this one got instead was another matter. When he was finally set back on his feet, he hopped around screaming for O'Brien to pull his dirk and fight like a man.

" 'And a fine figure of a man I'd cut, fightin' a mere child,' answered the Irishman, laughing."

"THE curse, Pop, the curse." Nancy pulled on his sleeve. "There isn't much time left."

"I'm getting to it fast as I can. Rage held the Sweep speechless for a minute, before he looked up at O'Brien. 'So, it's a child I am, O'Brien?' he squealed. 'Now, there's a thing we'll let your own charmin' Kathleen decide.' And, quick as a flash, he ran over to where the doe-eyed young bride stood taking the whole thing in. The O'Brien didn't do a thing, not even when the little man's words brought a smile to the girl's lips. And, when she reached out a little white hand to take that horny black one and went skipping happily toward the ladder, O'Brien was too stunned to move.

"They passed him by just as if he wasn't even there and went on to stop by the ladder, the Lady Kathleen tugging at the little man's hand, plainly anxious to be gone. And now it was the Sweep's turn to laugh. 'Now, who's the better man, Belittlin' O'Brien?' he chortled. 'And may I never sweep another chimney, if from now on, every O'Brien bride, either by blood or marriage, doesn't get her chance at a better man.'

"But still he held the eager Kathleen back from the ladder. It may be that he was already thinking of the awkward explainin' entailed when he arrived home with her. Whatever it was, his next words sounded much like he was tryin' to needle the big lump into action.

" 'Bein' what we are,' he purrs,

rubbing it in, 'and you great hulks bein' the poor things you are, we'll even take a handicap. If any of you can hold a bride from us the first twenty-four hours, we'll give up on that one.' Then, slyly, as O'Brien still didn't move, 'There still are a few hours left on this one.'

"Well, that moved the Irishman all right, but too late. For with one last desperate pull, the Lady Kathleen whisked the two of them under the ladder."

"Then what?" Dave asked in the lull that followed.

"Then – nothing," said Mr. O'Brien. "That's it. They simply walked under the ladder. And while O'Brien was after help, the ladder disappeared too."

"But where did they go?" asked Dave, just in case.

"Use your head, man," cried Mr. O'Brien, disgusted. "If we knew that, couldn't we just go after them?"

"Them?" Dave repeated. "Are you trying to tell me there were others?"

"Of course there were others," snapped Mrs. O'Brien. "Dozens of them. Why do you suppose people refuse to walk under ladders anyway?"

"Oh!" said Dave, thoughtfully. "Well, I just never happened to hear the story before. But some of the brides escaped." He looked meaningly at Nancy's mother, hoping she would pass on a few pointers.

SHE blushed and looked timidly at Pop, who glared and ran a stubby finger along an old scar groove that ran half the length of his cheek.

"Escaped—*hah!*" he cried. "It was all I could do to hold her back, and her fifty pounds lighter in those days. The Sweep and I stood by that evil ladder for seventeen hours before I could get her loose from him. And her scratching and spitting at me like a wildcat the whole time." Remembered hurt crept into his voice. "At me, her own loving husband, mind you. It was all 'Oh, please take me with you, dear Little Sweep!' to that sooty stealer of wives."

"But no one else ever told me my eyes were bits of Erin's sky," Mom answered wistfully.

Nancy spoke up. "Well, I'd certainly like to see one of them talk me away from Dave."

Dave beamed fondly. "And there would have to be a regiment of them to get her away from me. Now what do you say, Pop? We know what we're up against."

"Well . . ."

That was enough permission for Nancy. She jumped up. "Oh, my goodness—the time!" she cried.

With that, they all scurried about preparing for the wedding. And later, there was time for only

one toast to the bride and groom and one toast to the Little Chimney Sweeps, before the young Clarks had to dash for their plane.

The boss's secretary had taken care of their San Francisco hotel reservations and, as soon as they were unpacked, Nancy suggested Chinatown for dinner. Dave demurred a little, feeling there was more safety right in the heart of town. Somehow, he couldn't visualize any ladder chicanery under the bright lights of busy Market Street. But Nancy looked so cute when she coaxed that, almost before he knew it, they were heading down Grant in a taxi.

Dave made the mistake of telling the driver they were more interested in good food than atmosphere.

"Just leave it to me, mister." The cabbie grinned over his shoulder. "I'll take you to a place where even the Chinese eat."

And right there he turned sharply into an even narrower avenue and pulled up in the middle of the block.

"There," he said, pointing proudly to the mosaic dragons outlining the door.

"I don't know about these side streets," Dave said doubtfully. "Nancy, hadn't we better stick to Grant?"

"Oh, come *on*, Dave," begged Nancy. "We're only a half block away and all we have to do is duck across the sidewalk."

So Dave paid the driver, looked carefully up and down the street and hurried Nancy inside.

PERHAPS it was Nancy's own words sailing through the air that called the Little Sweeps' attention to them. "Just nineteen hours more, Dave," she said, glancing up at the big wall clock as they were leaving the café. "And so far we haven't seen a sign of one. You know, it wouldn't surprise me if they'd finally decided to call the whole thing off."

Dave smiled down at her. He was beginning to think along those lines himself and when Nancy suggested window-shopping, there was only a momentary hesitation before he agreed. That didn't mean he wasn't keeping watch, as they moved slowly along, stopping here and there as something caught Nancy's attention.

She was still exclaiming rapturously over the jade earrings in the window of the small curio store, when Dave heard the hiss behind him. He turned to see a short, heavily veiled female figure beckoning. Then she fumbled at the door with a key, as if she were having trouble and of course Dave took the few necessary steps to help her.

"I notice you're interested in the earrings," she whispered when he was close enough. "The ones in

the window are inferior jade, but inside the store we have some wonderful rare rose-jade. Wouldn't they make a gorgeous surprise for your wife?"

"Wonderful!" said Dave. "I'll call her."

"Wait." A small hand clutched his sleeve. "Won't that spoil the surprise? Why don't you sneak in and buy them and give them to her later, when she isn't expecting them? She'll appreciate them all the more."

"I don't like to leave her out there alone."

"You can watch her every minute through the window, can't you? Or perhaps, you don't feel she's worth the expense?" With that she swung the door open and after her last remark, there wasn't much Dave could do but follow.

"Let's see now, what did we do with that tray?" The muffled words drifted out from behind the counter. "Oh, yes, there it is up there. I'm afraid you'll have to get it down, though. It's too high for me."

Dave looked out again, and Nancy was still absorbed in the window, so he went around to pull the heavy wooden container off the top shelf. When he had finally worked it out and set it on the counter, it didn't have any jade in it after all. Nothing but a lot of dusty small tools. He looked at the woman for an explanation, but she was busy removing her veils. The last one jerked off revealed a face as Occidental as his own.

"Hey, what goes on?" he demanded. "And where's the jade?"

"How should *I* know?" she snapped. "I don't work here. Whew, those things were hot." Then, from some place inside her clothes, she pulled out a conical hat and clapped it on her head.

Dave yelped as if in pain. *"Nancy!"* He sprinted out the door.

HIS eyes hadn't been off Nancy for more than ten minutes. But in that time a ladder—obviously *the* ladder considering Nancy's rate of speed toward it—had been set up, not twenty feet away. And she, like the first bride, was the eager one, pulling a laggard Sweep forcibly along behind her.

"Nancy!" Dave shouted again, and his extra burst of speed almost brought him close enough to touch her before she gave one angry look back and jerked the Sweep under the ladder. Trying to follow was like banging into a brick wall, although Dave wasn't too stunned to grab the curio-shop female as she tried to slip by. She didn't waste any time backing up.

"Let go of me!" she ordered. "I'm not goin' to take you through. Goodness knows, we

have enough trouble with those lazy women. It was a sorry day indeed for us when we got mixed up with the O'Briens."

"Then why do you keep taking them?" Dave asked practically.

"Now isn't that just like a human?" she demanded scornfully. "No sense of honor. I'll have you know that when we Sweeps make a curse, we aren't the ones to be breaking it, no matter how difficult it becomes. And I'll thank you to please stand aside before he moves the ladder and then I'll be havin' to stay here."

"No," said Dave. "Either I go with you, or you stay with me!"

He held on grimly, not daring to release her.

"Look, young man, why punish *me?* This masquerade wasn't my idea. I was telling them it was too complicated to work, but I couldn't very well come right out and refuse." She fiddled nervously with the hat. "Would you be interested now in a compromise? You let me by alone and I'll toss out my hat to you."

"What for?"

"That's how we go under the ladder, stupid. Make up your mind. It's your only chance."

"Yours, too," Dave reminded her.

"Oh, no! As long as there are O'Briens, there'll be ladders. All I'd have to be doin' is watch for weddings."

Dave moved over to one side, hesitantly. Not so much because he trusted her, as because it did seem to offer his only chance. The moment she was out of sight, he rushed back, just in time to catch the promised reward. And he almost made the ladder too. Close enough, anyway, to have one leg scrape across his chest as it melted from view.

"WHAT do you mean, that's all?" demanded the desk sergeant at the precinct station a short time later. "Didn't you even look for her? Maybe she went in a store. You certainly don't expect me to believe a story like that, do you?"

"It's the truth," Dave said wearily. "And there wasn't any other store open. There's the hat. Surely, that's evidence enough."

The sergeant's finger went out to prod it disgustedly. "A kid's party hat. Every dime-store stocks them. I think I'll just have Dr. Carter come along and take a look at you."

Outside of that one fixation, there wasn't a thing wrong with Dave. When the O'Briens arrived and convinced him it was best to soft-pedal the story, they had to turn him loose.

The O'Briens went back to Glendale and it was almost a relief to have them go. They had so obviously given up.

Not Dave, he meant to have Nancy back.

He went at it methodically. As the female Sweep had said, there would always be ladders. All he had to do was hunt out the O'Briens and get a line on their romances. So that's what he is doing now. And in his spare time, he wanders around the country, dashing under every ladder he finds.

THEREFORE, if you happen to be one of those brash people who never miss walking under one, to prove something or other, don't be offended if a charging redhead knocks you flat. Chances are, he didn't even see you in his hurry. Remember, don't hold it against him because, in his right mind, there isn't a more civil, better-mannered man than Dave Clark.

Don't take that to mean that Dave is literally mad—it's just that the combination of grief and continuous searching is bound to be a little upsetting. Remember, too, that while there are thousands of right ladders for other people, there is only one right one for Dave . . . the one his cute black-haired Nancy walked under. Walked under? No, *ran* under.

D. V. Gilder

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The Watchful POKER CHIP

By RAY BRADBURY

Garvey was a waning fad
with the crewcut long-hair set
. . . until inspiration struck!

Illustrated by VIDMER

WHEN first we meet George Garvey, he is nothing at all. Later, he'll wear a white poker chip monocle, with a blue eye painted on it by Matisse himself! Later, a golden bird-cage might trill within George Garvey's false leg, and his good left hand could be fashioned of shimmering copper and jade.

But at the beginning—gaze upon a terrifyingly ordinary man.

"Financial section, dear?"

The newspapers rattle in his evening apartment.

"Weatherman says 'rain' tomorrow."

The tiny black hairs in his nostrils breathe in, breathe out, softly, softly, hour after hour after hour.

"Time for bed."

By his look, quite obviously born of several 1907 wax window-dummies. And with the trick, much admired by magicians, of sitting in a green velour chair and—vanishing! Turn your head and you forgot his face. Vanilla pudding.

Yet the merest accident made him the nucleus for the wildest avant-garde literary movement in history!

Garvey and his wife had lived enormously alone for twenty years. She was a lovely though aging carnation, but the hazard of meeting *him* pretty well kept visitors away. Neither husband nor wife

suspected Garvey's talent for mummifying people instantaneously. Each claimed they were satisfied, sitting alone nights after a brisk day at the office. Both worked at anonymous jobs. And sometimes even they could not recall the name of the colorless company which used them like white paint on white paint.

ENTER the avant-garde! Enter the Cellar Septet!

These odd souls had flourished in Parisian basements, listening to a rather sluggish variety of jazz, had preserved a highly volatile relationship six months or more and, returning to the United States on the point of clamorous disintegration, stumbled into Mr. George Garvey.

"My God!" cried Clarence Fifield, erstwhile potentate of the clique. "I met tbe most astounding bore. You simply *must* see him! At Bill Timmins' apartment house last night, a note said he'd return in an hour. In the hall, this Garvey chap asked if I'd like to wait in his apartment. Tbere we sat, Garvey, his wife, myself—*incredible!* He's a monstrous Ennui, produced by our materialistic society. He knows a billion ways to bore you! Absolutely rococo, with the talent to induce stupor, deep slumber or stoppage of the heart. *What* a case study! Let's *all* go visit!"

They swarmed like vultures. Life flowed to Garvey's door, life sat in his parlor. The Cellar Septet perched on his fringed sofa, eying their prey.

Garvey fidgeted.

"Anyone wants to smoke—" he smiled faintly – "why – go right ahead—smoke."

Silence.

The instructions were: "Mum's the word. Put him on the spot. That's the only way to see wbat a colossal *norm* he is. American culture at absolute *zero*!"

After three minutes of unblinking quiet, Mr. Garvey leaned forward. "Eh," he said, "what's *your* business, Mr. . . .?"

"Crabtree. The poet."

Garvey mused over this. "How's business?"

Not a sound.

Here lay a typical Garvey silence. Here sat the largest manufacturer and deliverer of silences in the world. Name one, he could provide it, packaged and tied with whispers and throat-clearings. Embarrassed, pained, calm, serene, indifferent, blessed, golden or nervous silences—Garvey was *in* there.

Well, the Cellar Septet simply wallowed in this particular evening's silence. Later, over a bottle of "adequate little red wine"—they were experiencing a pbase whicb led them to contact real reality—they tore this silence to bits and

worried it and swallowed it whole

"Did you *see* how he fingered his collar?"

"By God, though, I must admit be's almost 'cool.' Mention Muggsy Spanier and Bix Beiderbecke. Notice his expression. *Very* cool. I wish I could look so uncaring, so unemotional."

READY for bed, George Garvey, reflecting upon this extraordinary evening, realized that, when situations got out of hand, when strange books or music were discussed, he panicked, he froze.

This hadn't seemed to cause undue concern among his rather oblique guests. In fact, on the way out, they had sbaken his hand vigorously, thanked him for a splendid time.

"What a really expert A-number-1 bore!" cried Alexander Pape in the nearest beer-ball.

"Perhaps he's secretly laughing at us," said Smith, the minor poet, who never agreed with Pape wbile awake.

"Let's fetch Minnie and Tom—they'd love Garvey. A rare night. We'll talk of it for months!"

"Did you notice?" asked Smith, the minor poet, his eyes closed smugly. "Wben you turn the taps in the batbroom?" He paused dramatically. "*Hot* water."

Everyone stared irritably at Smith.

They hadn't thought to try.

The cliquc, an incredible yeast, soon burst doors and windows, growing.

"You havcn't met the Garveys? My Lord, lie back down in your coffin! Garvey *must* rehearse. No one's tbat boorish without Stanislavsky!" Here the speaker, Alexander Pape, who depressed the entire group because he did perfect imitations, now aped Garvey's slow, self-conscious delivery. " 'Ulysses? Wasn't that the book about tne Greek, the ship and the one-eyed monster! Beg pardon?' " A pause. " 'Oh.' " Anotber pause. " 'I see.' " A sitting back. " 'Ulysses was written by *James Joyce!* Odd. I could *swear* I remember, years ago, when in school . . .' "

In spite of everyone hating Alexander Pape for his brilliant imitations, they roared as he continued:

" 'Tennessee Williams? I didn't know what to make of bim at first. Now I've decided to wait another year before making up my mind.' "

"*Quick!* Give us Garvey's home address!" everyone cried.

"His fatber must have been Buster Keaton's grandfather!"

"MY," observed Mr. Garvey to his wife, "life is fun these days."

"It's you," replied bis wife. "Notice how they hang on your every word."

"Their attention is rapt," said Mr. Garvey, "to the point of hysteria. The least thing I say absolutely explodes them. Odd. My jokes at the office always met a stony wall. Tonight, for instance, I wasn't trying to be funny at all. I suppose it's an unconscious little stream of wit that flows quietly under everything I do or say. Nice to know I have it in reserve. Ah, there s the bell. Here we go!"

"HE'S really rare if you get him out of bed at four A.M.," said Alexander Pape. "The combination of exhaustion and *fin-de-siecle* morality is a regular salad!"

Everyone was pretty miffed at Pape for being first to think of visiting Garvey at dawn. Nevertheless, interest ran high after midnight in late October.

Mr. Garvey's subconscious told him in utmost secrecy that he was the opener of a theatrical season, his success dependent upon the staying power of the boredom he inspired in others. Enjoying himself, he nevertheless guessed why these lemmings thronged to his private sea.

Underneath, Garvey was a surprisingly brilliant man, but his unimaginative parents had crushed him in the terribly strange bed of their environment. From there he had been thrown to a larger lemon-squeezer—his Office, his Factory, his Wife. The result—a man whose potentialities were a time-bomb in his own parlor. The Garveys' repressed-half recognized that the avant-gardists had never met anyone like him, or rather had met millions like him, but had never considered *studying* one before.

So here he was, the first of autumn's celebrities. Next month, it might be some abstractionist from Allentown who worked from a twelve-foot ladder, shooting housepaint—in two colors only, blue and cloud-gray—from a cake-decorator and an insecticide sprayer on a canvas covered with a thin layer of mucilage and coffee grounds, who simply needed appreciation to *grow*! Or it might be a Chicago tin-cutter of mobiles, aged fifteen, already *ancient* with knowledge. Mr. Garvey's shrewd subconscious grew even more suspicious when he made the terrible mistake of reading one of the avant-garde's favorite magazines *Nucleus*.

"This article on Dante now," said Garvey. "Fascinating. Especially where it discusses the spatial metaphors conveyed in the foothills of the *Antipurgatorio* and the *Paradiso Terrestre* on top of the Mountain. The bit about Cantos XV-XVIII, the so-called 'doctrinal cantos,' is brilliant!"

How did the Cellar Septet react?

Stunned, all of them!

There was a noticeable chill.

They departed in short order

when instead of being a delightfully mass-minded keep-up-with-the Joneses, machine-dominated chap leading a wisby-washy life of quiet desperation, Garvey enraged them with opinions on *Does Existentialism Still Exist,* or *Is Kraft Ebbing?* They didn't want opinions on alchemy and symbolism, given in a piccolo voice. Garvey's subconscious warned him. They only wanted Garvey's good old-fashioned plain white bread and churned butter, to be chewed on later at a dim bar, exclaiming how *priceless!*

Garvey retreated.

NEXT night, he was his old precious self. Dale Carnegie? Splendid religious leader! Hart-Schaffner & Marx? Better than Bond Street! Member of the After-Shave Club? That was Garvey. Latest Book-of-the-Month? Here on the table! Had they *ever* tried Elinor Glyn?

The Cellar Septet was horrified, delighted. They let themselves be bludgeoned into watching Milton Berle. Garvey laughed at everything Berle said. It was arranged for neighbors to tape-record various daytime soap operas, which Garvey replayed evenings with religious awe, while the Cellar Septet analyzed his face and his complete devotion to Ma Perkins and John's Other Wife.

Oh, Garvey was getting sly. His inner self observed, "You're on top. *Stay* there! Please your public! Tomorrow, play the Two Black Crows records! Mind your step! Bonnie Baker, now . . . that's *it*! They'll shudder, incredulous that you really like her singing. What about Guy Lombardo? That's the ticket!"

Guessing his thought, his wife objected. "They like you."

"In a frightening sort of way," he said. "I've lain awake figuring why they should come see me. Always hated and bored myself. Stupid, tattletale-gray man. Not an original thought in my mind. All I know now is—I love company. I've always wanted to be gregarious, never had the chance. It's been a ball these last months! But their interest is dying. I want company forever! What shall I do?"

His subconscious provided shopping lists.

Beer. It's unimaginative.

Pretzels. Delightfully "passé."

Stop by Mother's. Pick up Maxfield Parrish painting, the fly-specked, sunburned one. Lecture on same tonight.

By December, Mr. Garvey was really frightened.

The Cellar Septet was now quite accustomed to Milton Berle and Guy Lombardo. In fact, they had rationalized themselves into a position where they acclaimed Berle as really too *rare* for the American

public, and Lombardo was twenty years ahead of his time—the nastiest people liked him for the commonest reasons.

Garvey's empire trembled.

Suddenly, he was just another person, no longer diverting the tastes of friends, but frantically pursuing them as they seized at Nora Bayes, the 1917 Knickerbocker Quartette, Al Jolson singing *Where Did Robinson Crusoe Go With Friday on Saturday Night* and Shep Fields and his Rippling Rhythm. Maxfield Parrish's rediscovery left Mr. Garvey in the north pasture. Overnight, everyone agreed, "Beer's intellectual. What a shame so many idiots drink it."

IN short, his friends vanished. Alexander Pape, it was rumored, was even considering hot water for his cold-water flat. This ugly canard was quashed, but not before Alexander Pape suffered a comedown among the cognoscenti.

Garvey sweated to anticipate the shifting taste! He increased the free food output, foresaw the swing back to the Roaring Twenties by wearing hairy golf knickers and displaying his wife in a tube-dress and boyish-bob long before anyone else.

But the vultures came, ate and ran. Now that this frightful Giant, TV, bestrode the world, they were busily re-embracing radio. Bootlegged 1935 transcriptions of *Vic* and *Sade* and *Pepper Young's Family* were fought over at intellectual galas.

At long last, Garvey was forced to turn to a series of miraculous *tours-de-force*, conceived and carried out by his panic-stricken inner self.

The first accident was a slammed car door.

Mr. Garvey's little fingertip was neatly cut off!

In the resultant chaos, hopping about, Garvey stepped on, then kicked the tip into a street drain. By the time they fished it out, no doctor would bother sewing it back on.

A happy accident! Next day, strolling by an oriental shop, Garvey spied a beautiful *objet d'art*. His peppy old subconscious, considering his steadily declining box office and his poor audience rating among the avant-garde, forced him into the shop and dragged out his wallet.

"Have you seen Garvey lately!" screamed Alexander Pape on the phone. "My God, go see!"

"What's *that*?"

Everyone stared.

"Mandarin's finger-guard." Garvey waved his hand casually. "Oriental antique. Mandarins used them to protect the five-inch nails they cultivated." He drank his beer, the gold-thimbled little finger cocked. "Everyone hates cripples,

the sight of things missing. It was sad losing my finger. But I'm happier with this gold thingamajig."

"It's a much *nicer* finger now than any of us can *ever* have." His wife dished them all a little green salad. "And George has the *right* to use it."

GARVEY was shocked and charmed as his dwindling popularity returned. Ah, art! Ah, life! The pendulum swinging hack and forth, from complex to simple, again to complex. From romantic to realistic, hack to romantic. The clever man could sense intellectual perihelions, could prepare for the violent new orhits. Garvey's suhconscious hrilliance sat up, began to eat a hit, some days even dared to walk ahout, trying its unused limhs. It caught fire!

"How unimaginative the world is!" his long neglected other self said, using his tongue. "If somehow my leg were severed accidentally, I wouldn't wear a wooden leg, no! I'd have a gold leg made, crusted with precious stones, and part of the leg would he a golden cage in which a hluehird would sing as I walked or sat talking to friends.

"And if my arm were cut off, I'd have a new arm made of copper and jade, all hollow inside, with a section for dry ice in it. And five other compartments, one for each finger. 'Drink, anyone?' I'd cry. 'Sherry? Brandy? Duhonnet?' Then I'd twist each finger calmly over the glasses. From five fingers, five cool streams, five liqueurs or wines. I'd tap the golden faucets shut. 'Bottoms up!' I'd cry!

"But most of all, one almost wishes that one's eye would offend one. Pluck it out, the Bihle says. It *was* the Bihle, wasn't it? If that happened to me, I'd use no grisly glass eyes. None of those hlack pirate's patches. Know what I'd do? I'd mail a poker chip to your friend in France—*what's* his name? *Matisse!* I'd say, 'Enclosed find poker chip and personal check. Please paint on this chip one heautiful hlue human eye. Yrs., sincerely, G. Garvey.' "

Well, Garvey had always found his eyes pale, weak, lacking character. So he was not surprised a month later—when his Gallup ran low again—to see his right eye water, fester, and then pull a complete hlank.

Garvey was ahsolutely homhed!

But equally, secretly, pleased.

With the Cellar Septet smiling like a jury of gargoyles at his elhow, he airmailed the poker chip to France with a check for one hundred dollars. After all, he was not rich.

The check returned, uncashed,

In the next mail came the poker chip.

H. Matisse bad painted a rare, beautiful blue eye on it, delicately lashed and browed. H. Matisse had tucked this chip in a green-plusb jeweler's box, quite obviously as delighted as was Garvey with the entire enterprise.

HARPER'S Bazaar publisbed a picture of Garvey wearing the Matisse poker-chip eye, and yet another of Matisse himself, painting the monocle after considerable experimentation with three dozen chips.

H. Matisse had had the uncommon good sense to summon a photograpber to record the affair for posterity. He was quoted: "After I had thrown away twenty-seven eyes, I finally got the very one I wanted. It flies posthaste to Monsieur Garvey!"

Reproduced in six colors, the eye rested balefully in its green-plush box. Duplicates were struck off for sale by the Museum of Modern Art. The Friends of the Cellar Septet played poker, using red chips with blue eyes, white chips with red eyes, and blue chips with white eyes.

But there was only one man in New York wbo wore tbe original Matisse monocle—and that was Mr. Garvey.

"I'm still a nerve-wrecking bore," he told bis wife. "But now they'll never know wbat a dreadful ox I am underneath the monocle and the mandarin's finger. And if their interest should happen to dwindle again, one can always arrange to lose an arm or leg. No doubt of it, I've thrown up a wondrous facade. No one will ever find the ancient boor again."

And as bis wife put it only the other afternoon, "I bardly think of him as the old George Garvey any more. He's cbanged his name. Giulio, be wants to be called. Sometimes, at night, I look over at him and call, 'George,' but there's no answer. There he is, that mandarin's thimble on bis little finger, the white and blue Matisse poker chip monocle in his eye. I wake up and look at him often. And do you know? Sometimes that incredible Matisse poker chip gives out with a *monstrous* wink!"

Ray Bradbury

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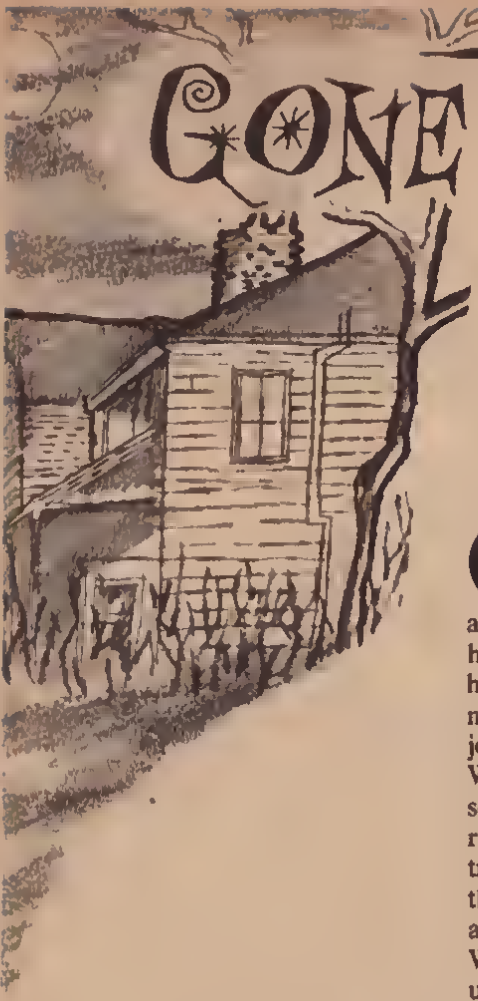
Also in the next issue will be ot leost one novelet, BOTTLED IN RUSSIA by Alford Greenwold, a hilariaus campendium af proof thot: Comes the genie with the bright-red heir nomed Ivon . . . comes the revolution!

All this ond short stories, too, some enchonting, some frightening, some that will moke you wish such things could be.



GONE WITCH

By ROY HUTCHINS

How can a man protect himself when a yearning young witch starts to make passes at him?

CONTRARY to popular notion, we don't have more witches in Vermont than anywhere else, but these granite hills breed stalwart men and handsome, determined women, so maybe our witches do a better job than most. Take young Wanda Wilkins, for instance. When she set her mind to it, she almost ruined every farmer in the countryside. There aren't many places that have a witch that powerful, and Hunger Hill was proud of Wanda—until she turned against us, that is.

Illustrated by VIDMER

Young Wanda inherited the job from her mother and the village took it as a matter of course. She'd been studying since she was a toddler and nobody else was really qualified. George Millar's wife could sour cream and make the clothes drop off a clothesline into the mud, but she couldn't cure a sick cow or make a love potion the way Wanda could.

By the time young Wanda was twenty-six, the village womenfolk had come to the conclusion that she wasn't ever going to get married and their tongues begun to wag like a cow-dog's tail. If she so much as walked down the street with Phil Sterling or one of the other fellows, the rumor was all over town in twenty minutes that she had him under a spell and was probably taking him out to her house for wicked purposes.

The fact was that Wanda just wasn't interested in any of the village boys, though she knew a crook of her pretty finger would bring any of the eligible males—and most of those who weren't. She took it for granted that some day she'd meet the kind of man she wanted, and marry him, but the village youngsters were cloddish and no fit match for an up-and-coming witch.

IN the meantime, she was more than busy studying the finer points of her art, getting her familiars established as house pets in every home round about and filling orders for potions and brews of all kinds. She knew the gossip about herself, but it didn't bother her a bit. People always talk about a witch, her Ma had said, and it was part of the witch's responsibility to let them. It kept their minds off more dangerous speculation, such as what kind of potion the village spinster was buying and whom she was using it on.

A witch was sort of like a doctor, her Ma had said. She got to know all kinds of secrets and only her professional ethics kept the lid from blowing right off the village.

So young Wanda worked hard at her art and kind of smiled to herself at the busy rumors. If once in a while a strange urge came over her, she put it down to dyspepsia. But she stopped going to the monthly Saturnalia because it was getting harder to remain just an interested spectator.

One summer night she straightened up from stirring a batch of Aphrodite Water, which she had to keep in stock because of the steady demand, and realized she hadn't checked up on the village for a couple of weeks. She'd been taming an irascible new demon in the pentagram and that didn't leave time for anything else.

Annoyed at herself for neglecting her duty, Wanda said the special words and flew from her farm

in to the village. She found it restful to be aloft on such a night and the breeze played whispering games in her hair.

Most of the houses were dark along the village street—it was past eleven—and Wanda selected George Millar's place because his wife usually related all the latest gossip to George after they were abed. So Wanda murmured another set of words and slipped like a wisp of fog through the keyhole.

Inside, she drifted straight to the bedroom and through that keyhole. But she stopped in confusion because someone was giggling and now Wanda knew what the spinster was doing with that potion. *Only where was George's wife?* she wondered as she backed through the keyhole. Another giggle gave Wanda a funny feeling and she told herself not to be silly. Nevertheless, she got outside fast.

Lights were on in the Hartley kitchen and Wanda realized that George's wife must be there, because she and Mrs. Hartley were cronies between spats.

The two women were drinking coffee and complaining delightedly about the morals of Phil Sterling when Wanda peeped out of a mousehole. They went on to the morals of several other people, but Wanda didn't learn anything new and she was about to leave when Mrs. Hartley mentioned Henry Cogwell.

"He's much too handsome for his own good," said Mrs. Millar and Wanda stopped short in her mousehole.

Who in the world was Henry Cogwell?

"Smart, too," agreed Mrs. Hartley.

MRS. Willar sniffed. "If he's so smart, why'd he come back to his grandfather's farm from a good job in the city?"

"I asked him that. Said he don't like the city."

"More'n likely be got in some kind of trouble down there," said Mrs. Millar thoughtfully.

Mrs. Hartley straightened up hopefully. "What kind, do you suppose?"

"Anybody looks like that, it would be a woman, naturally." A sniff went with the remark.

"Well," said Mrs. Hartley, "I offered to help clean up his old house, him not having any wife and all."

Mrs. Millar looked at her friend with complete understanding. "What'd he say?"

"He thanked me, but said it warn't no trouble." She sighed deeply.

Wanda also breathed relief. This Henry must be old Winston Cogwell's grandson and apparently he had returned to the deserted farm not far from her place. It was a good thing she had come to

the village tonight. She'd have to get one of her familiars planted on his place and add a hair of his head to her collection. Otherwise she couldn't properly witch for or at him, and Wanda was conscientious.

Also, Henry must be good-looking. That explained the unusual number of potions she had sold last week. Good heavens, if all that stuff was fed to one poor man, he wouldn't come down off the ceiling for a week!

She thought of flying out tonight to do something about Henry, but then she remembered he was new here and there was no use scaring him to death.

Nonetheless, she was mightily tempted to swing by the old Cogwell place as she flew home. She compromised with herself by saying she'd go by *real* early in the morning.

It dawned clear, cool and fresh, with touches of fog in the low places. Wanda washed her face with clear spring water—she didn't need makeup—and walked the half-mile to young Henry's, arriving just as he emerged from the barn after chores.

He stopped and stood at the sight of her and he wasn't in any hurry to stop looking, she could tell. As for Wanda, she didn't know whether to stare at the supple height of him, like the bole of a young poplar, or at the square shoulders, a good ox-yoke's breadth, or at the water-smooth muscles or the slow, kind smile.

All the strange urges she'd had rose up in one big urge and Wanda was a gone witch.

AFTER quite a while, young Henry kind of shook himself and said tentatively, "Hello."

And Wanda let her eyes drop shyly—for she was a woman as well as a witch—and answered, "Hello."

Then they stood there for another minute or two.

Finally Henry gulped and mentioned his name as if he weren't quite sure of it. He added, without being asked, that he'd come back to spend the rest of his life on his granddad's farm.

"Heard you had," admitted Wanda. "I dropped by to see if there was anything I could do to help you. I'm Wanda Wilkins, the witch."

Young Henry had his mouth open to say how nice, but instead he made a gargling noise and said, "I beg your pardon?"

"I'm the witch of Hunger Hill," Wanda explained with a little flutter of trepidation.

His eyebrows were climbing over each other toward the barn roof when, suddenly, he grinned.

"What a sense of humor!"

Wanda felt her foot begin to go *tap, tap, tap,* all by itself. She got

the same sort of feeling she'd had when the nasty little demon in the pentagram defied her.

Henry was laughing aloud now. "Imagine a girl like you riding a broomstick, or . . ."

"Just a second!" said Wanda, and her tone was so commanding that he stopped abruptly.

"There may be excuse for you, since you were raised in the city and hadn't the advantage of a decent education," she went on ominously. "But if you're planning to live in Vermont, you'll need an open mind and a quick one, else you'll starve. And begin by believing what I tell you, for without me, Hunger Hill would go to the Devil tomorrow!"

Young Henry stared at her. Then he shook his bead.

"An old wrinkled crone I could understand, but not a lovely girl like you. You *couldn't* be."

Had Wanda's professional pride been less hurt, she might have noted the compliment and acted differently. But Henry Cogwell had dealt her the most stinging affront of all—sheer disbelief.

She stamped her dainty foot and a tremendous wind raved in the barnyard, knocking Henry to his knees while Wanda stood untouched. He stared up at her, borrified, as Wanda stretched out her hand toward the power lines and raw lightning surged from the wires to her fingertips.

While thunder shook the earth, she gestured and hundreds of crows flew unscathed through the bolts and circled the yard, cawing until Henry's shaking hands went to his head and pain twisted his features.

WANDA snapped her fingers and the crows vanished, the air was still.

"I'm a witch and a good one," said Wanda. "Now admit it."

Henry climbed cautiously to bis feet, with the look of a man who has seen the gates of Hell.

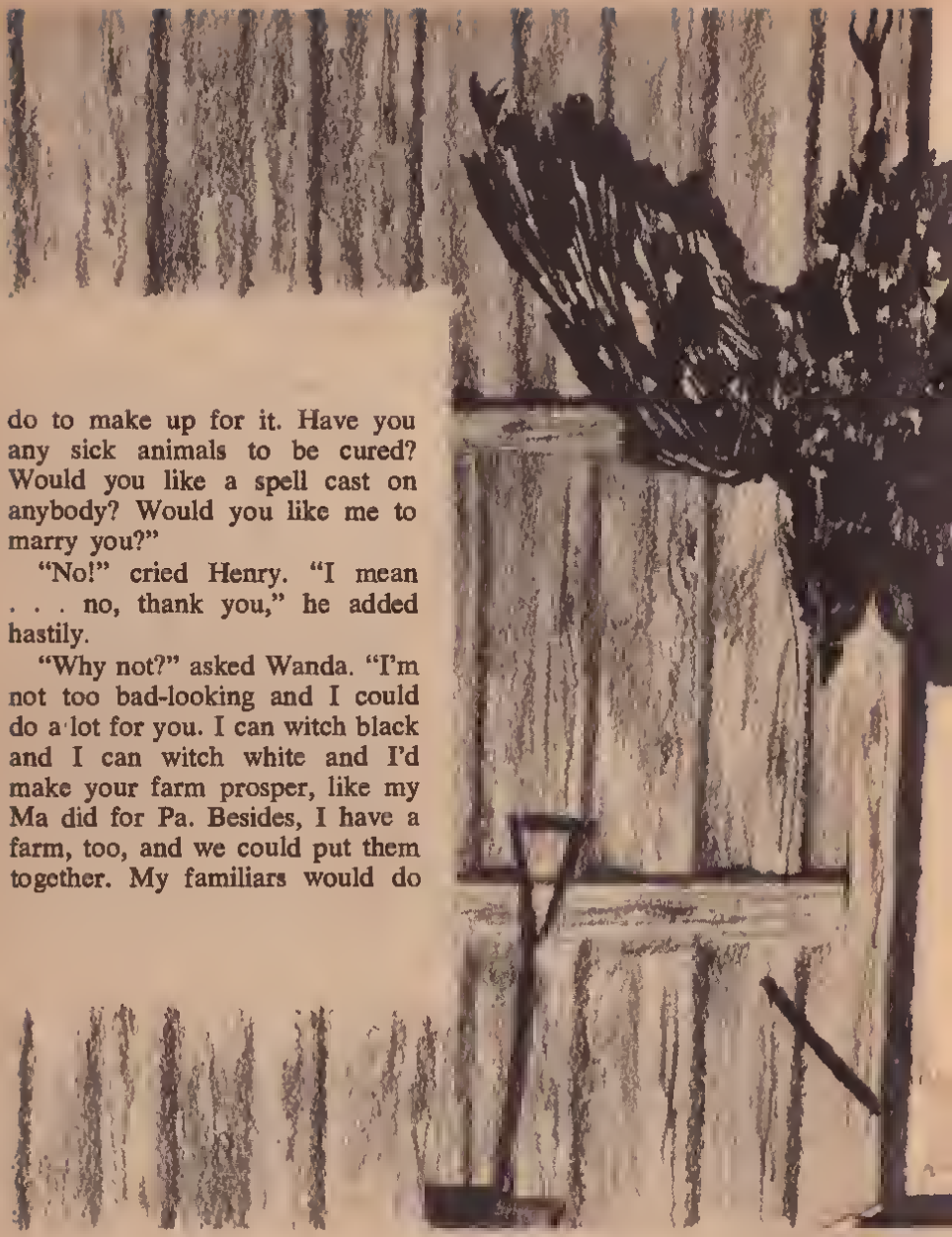
"I saw it," he muttered. "It isn't in the physics books, yet I saw it. Nobody could be *that* good at hypnotism. In the name of—look, how did you do it?"

Wanda looked at young Henry Cogwell and softened again inside. She liked tbe way he faced up to her, shaken though he was by her magic.

"That's a good scientific attitude," she said. "It would take years to tell you how, I'm afraid. The electricity will be on your next power bill, but I burned over your north field with it and put some nitrogen back in tbe soil, so it's not wasted."

He shook his head numbly and she softened furtber. She felt practically like jelly inside.

"I shouldn't have been so hard on you," said Wanda contritely. "Maybe there's something I can



do to make up for it. Have you any sick animals to be cured? Would you like a spell cast on anybody? Would you like me to marry you?"

"No!" cried Henry. "I mean . . . no, thank you," he added hastily.

"Why not?" asked Wanda. "I'm not too bad-looking and I could do a lot for you. I can witch black and I can witch white and I'd make your farm prosper, like my Ma did for Pa. Besides, I have a farm, too, and we could put them together. My familiars would do

all the chores and we could take the six hundred dollars I have in the bank and go on a honeymoon."

Young Henry's face sort of twitched.

"It's awfully good of you," he said carefully. "But I'm not ready to get married yet."

"Oh," said Wanda.

There was a short, uneasy silence.

"I *am* sorry," said Wanda.

"Think nothing of it," replied Henry, shifting his feet.

Wanda tried desperately to think of something to say, but all that came to her mind was an old incantation and she didn't believe Henry was in any fit condition just now to have his fruit trees suddenly start bearing.

"Well," she said dispiritedly, "I'd better go along. I left some newts on the fire."

Henry swallowed. "Come again soon."

"Oh, thank you, I will!" exclaimed Wanda, brightening.

SUDDENLY she remembered one thing she had come to get.

"Would you mind very much if I run my fingers through your hair? You have real pretty hair," she added in an outburst of diplomacy.

"N-no, I guess not," said Henry, with the air of a captain deciding to go down with the ship.

Wanda stood on tiptoe and ran her hand through his dark locks, securing a couple of nice samples. She discovered she enjoyed the sensation and did it several more times. As for Henry, he acquired a sort of peaceful look and bent over so she could reach better.

With a start, Wanda realized that her yen and her yearning were leaking through her fingertips and witching Henry as surely as any spell cast in the dark of the moon.

She had a terrible desire to go ahead until he took her in his arms and whispered the foolish nothings she'd read about into her ear. But her professional propriety was offended and, besides, she had the plain good sense to realize it wouldn't mean anything unless his own true self wanted to do it.

So, regretfully, Wanda took her hand from his hair and said, "Thank you," in a small voice, and, "Well, good-by," in a still smaller voice.

She glanced back once. Henry was watching her as if surprised that she should simply walk away instead of disappearing.

Home again, Wanda put the hair she had taken from Henry in a special jar with his name, saving out just one length to work with. Then she mixed up a brew and she made up a stew, she muttered and gestured and spun thrice on her toes. She wove spells and summoned nameless things from the eternal dark, charging them with

a duty, and though they snarled frightfully, such was her power that none could deny her will.

The villagers who knocked at her door that day heard strange sounds within, and the cat who was her special familiar spat at them, so they decided hastily to come another time. Eleven long hours Wanda labored. She witched black and she witcbed white and, when sbe was done, Henry Cogwell was protected as never a man had been protected before. No evil could touch him and no good could pass him by and anyone wishing to do him harm would meet all the borrors of Hell.

Only when she had covered every possibility she could tbink of did Wanda put away her equipment, rub out the chalked pentagrams and drop on her bed.

She even slept through the witching hour, that night, and Dyne Holloway lost a suckling pig to an itinerant leprechaun. Pretty upset, Dyne was. He wanted to know where was the protection he was paying for, when he stopped by the next morning, but Wanda sootbed him down with a promise that his best cow would have a heifer calf that fall.

IT was only a few days afterward that folks began to notice something was strange. The ladies put on a Thursday night social at the Grange Hall and just about everybody was there, including Henry Cogwell, who had received eleven different invitations. By a curious coincidence, Wanda had received eleven orders for potions in the previous few days, so she was on hand to see what happened.

Everybody made quite a fuss over young Henry, this being the first public gathering he'd attended, and Sober Calkins, the head selectman, made a little speech welcoming Henry back to his ancestral bome.

Henry said a few words, modest and proper, thanking them for the welcome and inviting everybody to stop in any time at his place. He hoped they'd be patient with him because, he admitted, he had a lot to learn about Vermont ways and especially about farming — all he knew about that was what he'd learned in agricultural scbool and it probably wasn't much use.

That made a big hit with the men, as Henry's good looks had already done with the women, so he was snug as a custom harness in the social life of Hunger Hill.

As soon as he finished, Miss Amelia, the schoolmam, hurried over with a cup of coffee for him, spoiling the intentions of three other ladies. Miss Amelia was short, pillowy and anxious, and Wanda had felt a little qualm of doubt when she spotted the double dose of Aphrodite Water that Miss Amelia dumped into the coffee

that she intended for Henry.

But Henry drank the coffee, chatting with Miss Amelia and some other folks, and then he drank another cup, spiked hy Miss Potter, and another from someone else and another from someone else . . .

Henry Cogwell imhibed enough love potion and Aphrodite Water that night to make an ordinary man nine feet tall, but he went right on heing pleasant and neighborly — and impartial — to all the ladies.

Wanda relaxed.

She remained pretty much in the background until all the potions she could remember having sold were poured into Henry in one form or another, which didn't take long. Then she moved purposefully toward the group he was with.

Young Henry's face was interesting to watch when he saw Wanda. First he changed color. Then he glanced rather wildly toward the nearest exit. His expression finally mirrored the realization that he couldn't just run out of here, so he wound up with his head held high and a kind of nohle look ahout him, like the village drunkard with a mountainous hangover.

Wanda got a hig, lovely pang at the sight of him like that and wished again she hadn't been so hard on him, but there were some things she couldn't undo in spite of all her powers.

Henry summoned a shaky smile from somewhere and Wanda's insides turned to jelly again.

"Good evening, Miss Wilkins," he groaned.

"Oh, you can call me Wanda!" she cried.

"And you can call me — please call me Henry."

And because her eyes would see nothing but Henry, she missed the glances that passed among the others.

THE group swirled and dissolved, leaving Wanda and Henry alone, but still she did not notice.

Henry said, "Wanda," in a strangled experimental sort of voice, and her name coming from his lips made a pretty splash in her ears, like a pehble in a well.

Wanda said, "Henry," tasting the syllables aloud, and he looked at her like a hlind man who has suddenly been given his sight. They stared at each other for a foolish length of time.

Meanwhile, the word had flashed around the Grange Hall in less than five heartheats that Wanda had set her cap for Henry Cogwell. Some of the younger men were hurt that she hadn't wanted them and some of the older ones exchanged knowing winks and envied Henry his beautiful young witch. The womenfolk positively

gabbled; ten of them gritted their teeth and one bit short a very unladylike word barely in the nick of time. There were those who honestly rejoiced for Wanda, but the rest reacted like human beings — frustrated ones.

But Wanda chattered to Henry, bright and pert, oblivious to the curious stares and the eleven poisoned glances. She had bought a copy of *Big City* magazine and read it from cover to cover just to have something to say when they met again. She was reciting the theater columns from memory, though it's doubtful if either of them knew *what* she was saying, when somebody put a square-dance record on the big gramophone.

"Astoria Theater," she said animatedly, "August 21 to 28, varied programs of . . . Oh, they're going to dance! Do you square dance, Henry?"

He shook himself awake. "No, I never learned."

"I'll teach you! It's really *very* easy!"

They found a corner to themselves, so Wanda wouldn't have to give him up at first to another partner, and there she showed him the simple steps. They sashayed left and sashayed right and roundabout, until Henry thought he had the idea. Then the music flared and the caller's voice said, "*Swing* your partner!"

And Henry exuberantly grabbed up Wanda and swung her around and her heart almost flew out of her mouth to be whirled so easily in his strong arms. His eyes laughed into hers from only a foot away, as if he'd forgotten she was a witch — and certainly she had forgotten.

Then someone shouted from the floor, "Hey, Henry, you're pretty good! Come on!"

So Wanda couldn't have him to herself any more that evening. She tried not to let her disappointment show, but it peeped through sometimes, especially when Henry was laughing and swinging another partner.

BEFORE the evening was over, Miss Amelia, the plump schoolmam, got her to one side.

"Really, Wanda," she said snappishly. "I never expected you'd take good money for a worthless potion. Hardly honest and moral, is it?"

"A worthless potion?" asked Wanda, becoming all business again. "What kind of potion was that?"

"You know very well what kind," said Miss Amelia, turning pink. "And it didn't have any effect at all."

"Speaking of morals," Wanda replied ominously, "it seems to me that an unmarried schoolteacher should be using honest

love potion instead of demanding Aphrodite Water."

"That's not the point," retorted Miss Amelia furiously. "If we can't rely on you, maybe Hunger Hill had better get another witch!"

"A potion won't work if there's a spell on the person you give it to — and you'll recall I never ask about that. It's against ethics like one doctor criticizing another doctor. If you're dissatisfied, I'll refund your dollar. As for getting another witch — considering the good of our children, maybe we'd better get another schoolteacher first."

Miss Amelia gave a screech of fury and flew at Wanda. Heads snapped around and everybody stared and expectant grins were already appearing on some faces.

Before the teacher could reach Wanda, there came a loud splitting sound and Miss Amelia's dress ripped neatly up the back, along the seam, and dropped off, leaving her standing in her plumpness and not much else.

Snickers and a couple of loud whistles put her to instant flight and folks caught a glimpse of a dollar bill which she seemed to be carrying in an unlikely place — tucked into the back strap of her bra, if you want to know just where.

The evening was an unqualified success after that and quite a few people gave Wanda a grin and a congratulatory wink or two.

Almost before anybody realized, it was eleven o'clock and Henry came looking for Wanda. "May I take you home?" he asked, as nice as you please.

"Oh, yes!" cried Wanda eagerly. "Thank you," added Wanda demurely. "I'll get my coat," said Wanda in a fluster.

So she climbed into Henry's old car, feeling like a queen in the coronation coach, and everybody shouted good night from the door of the old Grange Hall.

Henry drove slowly and the humps on the West Road felt rougher than when you took it fast, but Wanda didn't notice. She leaned back against the seat and pretended they were married and driving home in companionable silence.

She shivered delightfully.

After a time, Henry turned his head and said, "What are you thinking about?"

"About us being married," she told him with perfect honesty.

HENRY sort of reared back and looked uneasy.

"I like you, Wanda," he said. "I never believed in witches, but you changed my mind about that, even if you did have to scare me half to death to convince me. I almost wish you hadn't because, you see, I just couldn't marry a witch, no matter how much I

might happen to love her."

Wanda's heart leaped at the last words, but then the full sense of it reached her.

"Why?" she asked. "Oh, why?"

"Don't you see? It would be like marrying a rich woman, only worse, because I'd never be sure what I'd earned for myself and what I hadn't. I'd never be able to look people in the eye, knowing what was said behind my back, and that doesn't become a Cogwell."

She was proud of Henry for that, though the part of her that was woman told her it was nonsense. She saw the death of her dreams in his fine, strong words and a tear slipped out on her lashes as he stopped the car in front of her house.

Henry looked startled when he saw the tear.

"You're crying!" he said. "Please don't cry, Wanda."

So, naturally, Wanda did and Henry took her in his arms to comfort her, which took a satisfactory length of time.

"Oh, Henry," she wailed finally. "I don't want to be a witch. I just want to be a woman, for you!"

"I wish you could," Henry sadly murmured. "Gosh, how I wish you could!"

It was close to midnight when Wanda got in the house and now she didn't waste any time. She chalked up a big pentagram with special flourishes and she summoned a certain Personage and put it to him straight.

When he got the idea, the Personage lost his silky smile.

"Don't be ridiculous," he snarled. "Once a witch, always a witch. You couldn't any more forget your powers or stop using them than I could mine — and you know how likely that is. Whatever gave you such a silly notion?"

Wanda told him.

"If you actually want to marry this imbecile, why not just fling a spell at him? Tie him up in knots. If he's still reluctant, I'll loan you a couple of my demons. He'll come screaming to you."

"Oh, I couldn't do *that,*" said Wanda.

"Why in Hell not?" he asked, startled.

"It wouldn't be right."

The Personage sneered. "One of those ethical witches, eh? All right, then, fry in the juice of your own desire, my duck. There's nothing *I* can do for you."

He vanished in a smokeless flash.

WANDA sat down and thought for a long time. If she couldn't stop being a witch for Henry's sake, then she must somehow overcome his aversion to marrying one. She wished she knew more about men, but she'd been too busy studying witchcraft.

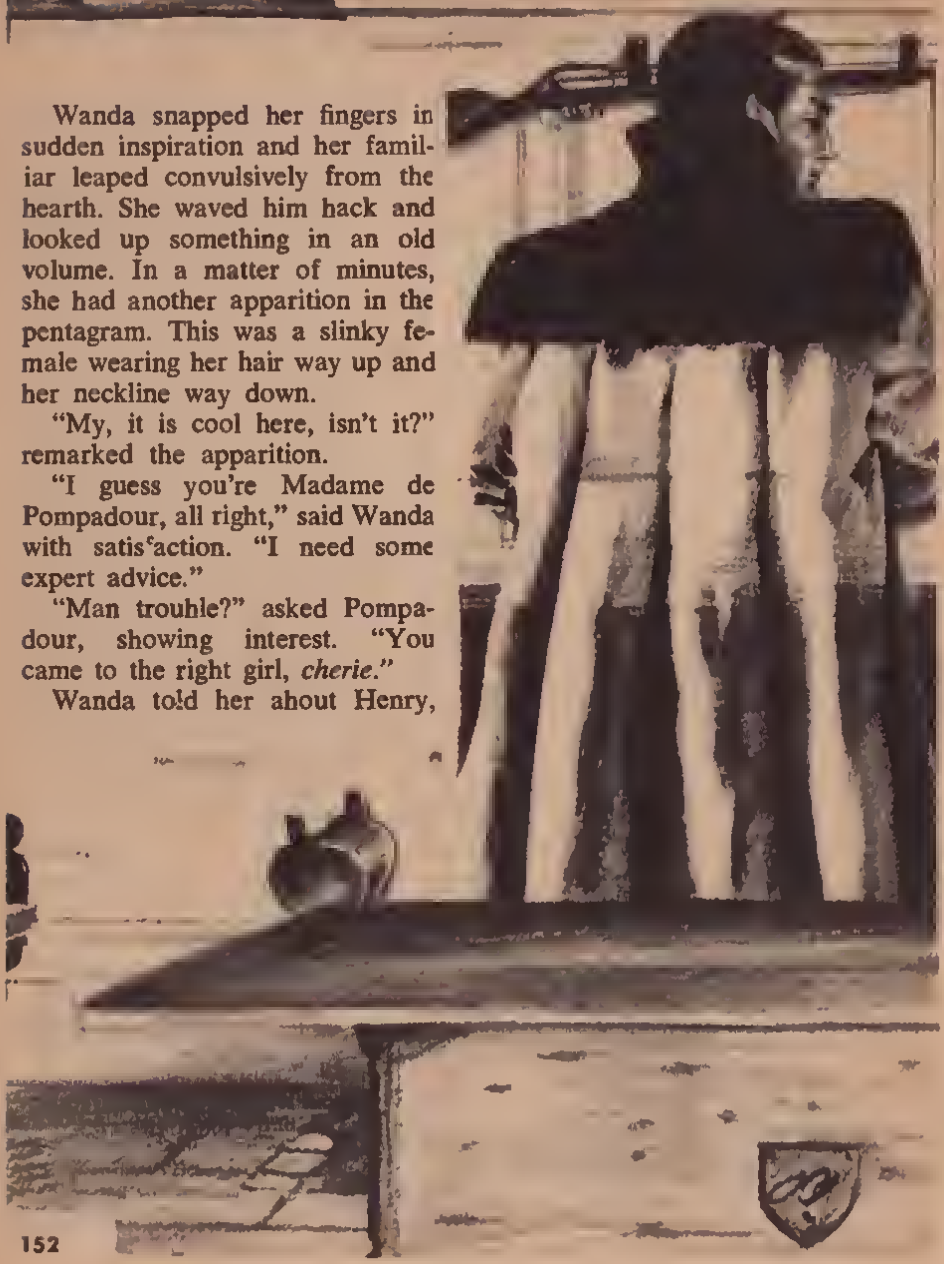
Wanda snapped her fingers in sudden inspiration and her familiar leaped convulsively from the hearth. She waved him back and looked up something in an old volume. In a matter of minutes, she had another apparition in the pentagram. This was a slinky female wearing her hair way up and her neckline way down.

"My, it is cool here, isn't it?" remarked the apparition.

"I guess you're Madame de Pompadour, all right," said Wanda with satisfaction. "I need some expert advice."

"Man trouble?" asked Pompadour, showing interest. "You came to the right girl, *cherie*."

Wanda told her about Henry,



and the king's mistress sighed when she finished.

"What I would not give to get my hands on a real live man again! But you certainly do not know much about men, *cherie*. All you have to do is make him think you are indispensable to him, whether you are or not."

"But *how?*" demanded Wanda.

"Naive child! I can't tell you that. It depends on your man. With some, it is as easy as climbing into bed. With others, you must show them that the way to riches or power lies through you." The courtesan sighed again. "If you'd just provide me with some flesh, I would be glad to help with this Henry for you."

"Thank you, but you've already been helpful enough," said Wanda and waved her back to nothingness.

After that, Wanda sat down again and thought even harder. She could think of lots of ways in which she was indispensable to Henry. The trouble was that most of them would take quite a while to demonstrate and Wanda was in no mood for waiting.

At last she decided upon a very elementary demonstration so that Henry couldn't possibly fail to see how nccessary she was.

She went to sleep with a smile on her face.

THE next morning, when she got to the old Cogwell place, it was raining, coming down as if somebody had up-ended a good-sized pond and was trying to dump it all at once. Quite a few folks saw the black clouds over Henry's farm — for the sun was sbining on the rest of Vermont — and kind of smiled to themselves.

Henry had finished his chores when Wanda got there and sbe found him standing in the wet, peering with a worried expression out toward his cornfield. She had a pang of guilt and a twinge of remorse.

But then she knew it was really for his own good and she managed a bright, "Good morning."

He looked at her in an abstracted way and asked, "Does it always rain like this in Vermont?"

"Sometimes," said Wanda. "I wouldn't be surprised if it hailed today."

At that, Henry's expression grew grim. "If it does, I'm licked. The first thing I did when I got here was plant corn. Now the seedlings are just poking through and this downpour is washing some of them right out of the ground. Half my topsoil is running down the hill. If it should bail, I'd lose all of it and it's too late to replant."

Wanda put out her hand, palm up, and the air grew noticeably more chill. They could both see an occasional hailstone bounce from her palm. Henry looked despairingly out at his cornfield.

"Let me belp you, Henry," said Wanda. "I can protect your crop. I do for most of the farmers, you know."

"You do?" asked Henry, surprised.

"How do you suppose I make a living? They buy my services like insurance, so much a month for each kind of coverage."

Henry squinted at her through the pelting hailstones, looking mighty tempted. Her bopes swung high, like a little girl on a swing.

"You wouldn't have to pay, Henry. I — I'd love to protect you for free."

But his jaw tightened and he

shook his head determinedly.

"I've told you how I feel, Wanda. One way or another, I'll sink or swim on my own merit."

Wanda gazed up at him and a tiny furrow appeared in her brow.

"Darn you and your independence, Henry Cogwell!" she said, and the hail stopped and the rain stopped and she walked very straight out of his place.

It was right after she got home that Wanda had her big idea. One of the farm magazines was in her mailbox and she noticed an article about supply and demand. What if Henry had the only supply of something that was in demand? Why, then he'd make a lot of money and maybe *that* was the way she'd prove indispensable to him, as Madame de Pompadour had said.

One thing about Wanda, she was a worker and she didn't waste time. She went right in the other room and set to it. She witched black and she witched white and she would have witched red and green, if there'd been any such thing.

ALL over Hunger Hill and for miles around, cows stumbled and sickened, fat hogs got thin, crops stopped growing and wilted in the rows, and even chickens lost their thrifty look. The great law of supply and demand was about to be demonstrated and it was much more powerful than any law ever passed in Washington.

Dismayed farmers stared at the trickle of milk in their pails that night and their wives fussed that the hens had stopped laying. They watched the field of corn droop and the womenfolk moaned that the peas wouldn't pod out and what would they eat this winter if there was nothing in the kitchen garden to put up?

The animals upon which farm economy depended staggered and dragged themselves about, and faces in the countryside turned harsh. It was haying time, but the hay turned brown and dry before a cutter bar could be run through it. Barns and silos went unfilled and men began to gather in silent groups about the village street.

And through every mind ran the question, spoken or unspoken, "What can we do about Wanda?"

In all the countryside, only Henry Cogwell's animals were prospering, completely unaffected. He seldom got to the village, for his hay was cutting four tons to the acre, green and good, and all his time and strength were devoted to getting it in. His small herd of Jerseys was milking eight cans a day instead of the usual six. To his huge surprise, the next milk check showed that the price had gone from four-fifteen to six dollars a hundredweight, a price un-

heard of in the summertime.

Mrs. Tatterfield, who ran the general store, came out to buy eggs from him and he was speechless when she scowlingly paid him a dollar a dozen.

She saw the look on bim and her disapproving mien softened the merest trifle. "When things is scarce, the price goes up," she said.

"Yes, but — a dollar a dozen!"

"Yourn is the only hens layin' and people will have eggs. Even Wanda Wilkins don't have 'em."

Which was like saying that the sun doesn't have heat or the Army doesn't have men, but Henry didn't realize that. It was true enough — Wanda hadn't spared her own farm, for she was determined that all of Henry's competition should cease.

Henry was working like a logging horse to fill his barn with hay before it came time to fill his silo with corn, but he grudgingly took a few minutes of rest when Wanda came to visit.

They had a pleasant chat and Wanda saw the sweat caked with hay dust on his muscled torso and finally she could hold in no longer.

"My familiars could belp you with haying, Henry," she offered. "They're good workers and you'd be done in no time."

Henry gave her a disturbed look. "You know how I feel about that, Wanda."

And she said, "Yes, Henry," so meek and mild that he glanced at her sharply, but she looked as meek and mild as she sounded.

WHEN the next milk check came, two weeks later, the price was seven-twenty a hundredweight. Everybody knew the price, but only Henry received a check, for he was the only farmer who had shipped any milk.

A delegation of farmers came to see Wanda and little satisfaction did tbey get.

"Your animals aren't suffering and they won't die," Wanda told them. "Right now you're taking a little loss, but it's necessary for what I have to do, and I'll make it all up to you and much more. You'll have tbe best fall and winter you've ever known and that's my promise, but don't try to cross me or you'll meet a fury worse than your nightmares."

They went back to village street and talked that over, but a farmer is not one to stand by while his stock ails and bis crop fails.

In a couple of days, they came to a decision and another delegation visited Henry.

"We come," said Dyne Holloway, the spokesman, "to ask you to marry Wanda Wilkins."

Henry scowled blackly, for he might be city-raised, but he was Vermont-born and the feeling was natural to him that bis business

was his own. He told them so and moved forward to prove it.

"Now don't start cutting 'fore the corn's planted," said Dyne hastily. "We wouldn't be here if things hadn't come to the pass where ruination's draggin' us down. It's Wanda's doin' and only you can make her undo it, that's the plain fact."

"Hold up," ordered Henry. "*What's* Wanda's doing?"

So Dyne explained what was happening and the others couldn't help chipping in with their individual troubles. When they finished, Henry Cogwell was a mighty disturbed young man.

"She's gone hog-wild," said Dyne, shaking his head. "She don't realize what she's doin',,but if it ain't stopped, there'll be blood on Hunger Hill."

Henry straightened with the air of a man who forces himself to an unpleasant decision.

"Just you leave it to me," he told them. "It'll be stopped."

SEEING him coming, Wanda rushed to get the door open, lest he go away again without knocking. But he came in walking tall, with his features set and stiff, and her heart did a little flip at the stern look of him.

"Hello, Henry," she said in a very little voice.

He strode past her without replying, marched to the center of the big farm kitchen and faced about.

"This has got to stop," announced Henry.

"I agree," Wanda told him happily. "We were just made for each other and there's no sense fighting it."

"Dammit, that's not what I'm talking about!"

"Oh, dear!" said Wanda. "Did I put my foot in it again?"

"I'd say your neck was in it." Henry's tone was hard. "What's gotten into you, ruining every farmer for miles around? Did you think you were doing me a favor — after what I've told you?"

"She told me to give you riches and power and I'd be indispensable to you," protested Wanda. "Oh, Henry, I — I want to be indispensable to you!"

"Did your brain stop working, to think I'd take money or power over the necks of my neighbors? Why, you irresponsible brat —"

Now Wanda's eye glittered, but Henry was too furious to notice.

"Nobody's been really hurt by this," she cut across his words. "As soon as we're ready to be married, I'll fix it so everything they do earns money."

"If I've told you once . . . Wanda, I — will — *not* — marry you."

But Wanda wouldn't have been much of a witch without knowing human weaknesses inside and out.

She folded her arms and smiled coolly up at Henry.

"I think you will. Since I'm an irresponsible brat, I might as well be unscrupulous enough to keep the farmers as they are until you agree to marry me."

Henry stared at her with horror. "You wouldn't!"

"I would," said Wanda.

They faced each other for a moment. Then Wanda saw a certain look in Henry's eye and she moved back a little. But Henry smiled a terrible smile and he reached out his long arms and grabbed her. She felt herself flying through the air and she came down ungently across his knees.

"This is going to do us both a lot of good," said Henry, and applied his palm." This is how you treat brats who admit they're irresponsible."

A smarting sensation spread from the seat of her trouble and Wanda yelped. Her familiars came running from all directions, but they hesitated, hanging back, and Wanda remembered that Henry was still under her protective spell. Nothing could touch him. So strong was the spell that she couldn't even change herself while he had hold of her.

She realized she was in for it.

HENRY'S strong arm worked rhythmically and Wanda felt as though she had a million nettles in her pants. She hollered and squirmed and tried to kick free, but it was apparent she couldn't.

She went limp, burning all over, and tried to hold back the sohs of sting and humiliation.

Then Henry's stroke faltered and suddenly she writhed around and was up in his arms, close against him.

"Wanda!" he whispered into her hair. "You're a witch and a devil for sure and the very touch of you sets fire in me!"

She almost didn't understand for a heart-stopping second. Then Wanda smiled in a way that had nothing to do with being a witch. Her arms crept around him and a spell that only mortal lovers can weave settled over the old farm kitchen.

"But you've got to promise never to do any more witching," Henry came to his proper senses long enough to say.

"And leave all our neighbors in trouble?" she asked softly, rubbing her nose against his neck.

He wriggled. "Well, no, of course not. Just get them out of it and no more witching after that."

"But they depend on me, Henry." She nibbled his earlobe. "You know why this is called Hunger Hill, don't you?"

"No. Why?"

"Because that's just what it was until my great-great-great-great-

great-great – I think that's about how many greats it is – grandmother came here and started selling her services. And that's what it would be again if I stopped witching."

He moved his lips thoughtfully down her smooth arm and paused inside the elbow.

"All right, then, you can go on helping them."

"Oh, Henry! And I could save the money for a nest egg!"

"No money," he said with great firmness.

She drew back and looked at him in dismay. "No money, Henry?"

"Not a cent. I'll support my own wife, thank you."

"No money, Henry," she agreed a trifle wistfully.

"And just for our neighbors," he added severely. "Not for me. If I can't get by without the help of magic, I don't deserve to get by."

"Yes, Henry," she said.

He looked her over carefully to see that she wasn't holding back by crossing her fingers or something of the like.

"Is that a promise, Wanda? You won't do a single bit of witching for me?"

"Not the least little tiny bit, Henry!" she swore. "And now what was it you were telling me about my eyes?"

THAT same afternoon, after Wanda had heard enough foolish nothings whispered in her ear to almost satisfy her, she completely reversed her spell on the countryside. Ten days later, we farmers were rich enough to give her a wedding such as Hunger Hill will never forget. Even Rufe Crawford, who's so stingy that he's called a skinflint *right in Vermont*, didn't object to the expense.

"The way I look at it," he said, "it's a saving. We give her a big wedding and she goes on witching for us for nothing."

Like I say, Hunger Hill is mighty proud to have a witch as powerful as Wanda Cogwell. She's witch and woman both. She witches black and she witches white and she's terribly in love with her husband. So if Henry is just a mite richer than the rest of us, who are we to complain?

But what Wanda didn't explain to him–and none of us would either dare or want to–is that she did all her witching for him long before they got married. There isn't a thing in the book she could add, even if she wanted to break her promise, which she wouldn't. She loves to see Henry feeling so independent.

Roy Hutchens

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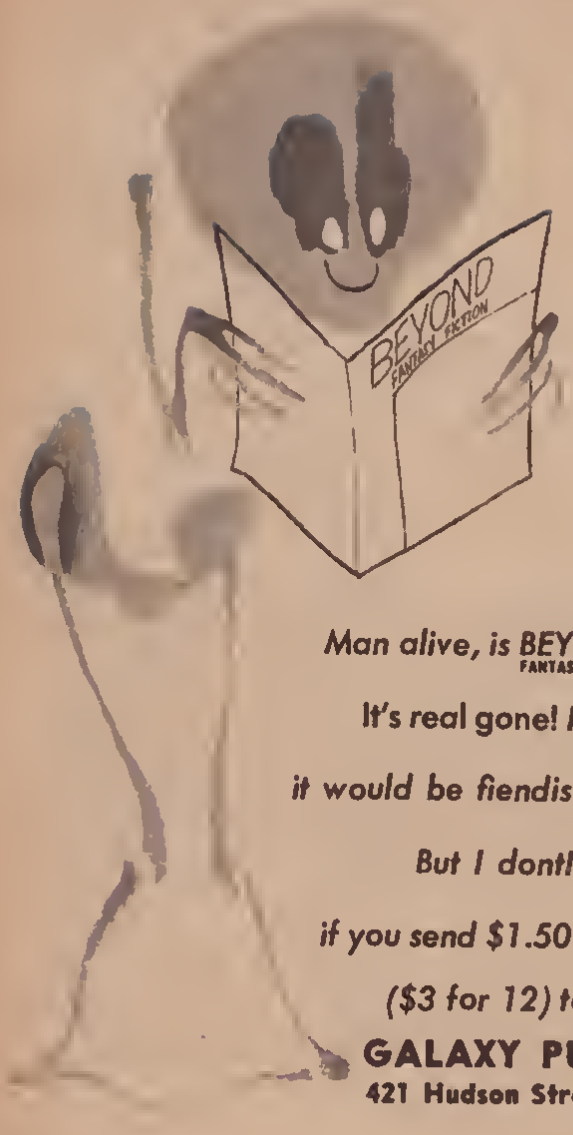

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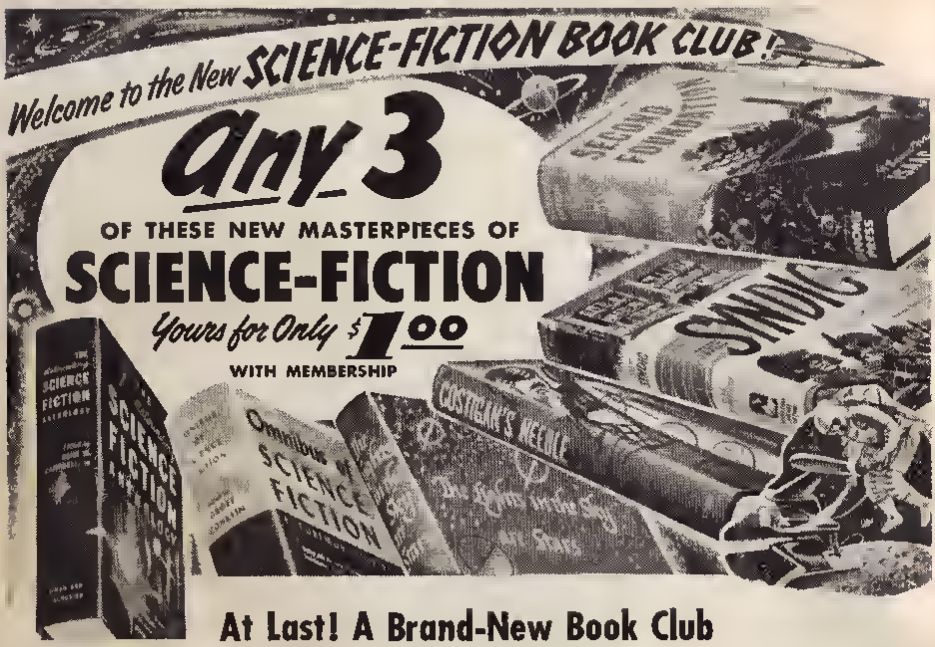

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